

INDIAN ELECTIONS

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AT the time of going to press, not all the results in the current Indian elections are available. But the picture which has already emerged shows unmistakably the tremendous advance of the popular democratic front against the ruling régime of reaction represented by Congress.

The present undemocratic electoral system based on the English model of single-member constituencies has given the Congress majorities in all but four States and a clear majority in the Central Parliament (the House of the People). But the voting shows that even in those States where Congress has secured a majority, *they have not secured a majority of the total votes cast.* (Incidentally, the basis of representation to the State legislature is one representative per 75,000 population, whereas for the Central legislature it is one representative per 500,000 to 750,000 population.)

Thus in Bombay State, where the Congress has secured more than 80 per cent of the seats, less than half of the electorate cast their votes for the Congress. In West Bengal, on the basis of 181 results declared so far, while the Congress has secured 2,140,304 votes, the non-Congress votes amount to 3,283,375. Of these a mere 493,185 votes were secured by communal and other reactionary organisations, so that the total combined Left vote amounts to 2,790,190, or a little more than the total Congress vote. Yet, of the 181 seats, only about 40 seats have gone to the Left. There is no doubt that the same picture could be even further emphasised on the basis of election results in Madras Presidency, Hyderabad and Travancore-Cochin, where Congress has lost heavily to the united front of Left parties.

But this is not the whole story of this 'fair and free' election. These elections were held under conditions which have no parallel in any country that claims to be democratic. The Communist Party of India which everyone, including the *Sunday Times*, *Observer* or the *Economist*, not to mention the *New Statesman and Nation*, admits today is the strongest opposition party in the country, fought the elections with its units in Travancore-Cochin and Hyderabad banned, with thousands of its workers in prison,

with warrants of arrest pending against some of its foremost leaders and in certain cases even against the candidate himself. Especially significant is the case of two elected representatives, Ramamurthy and Achuta Menon, who were promptly rearrested after they were elected, as they had to be released on parole earlier in order to enable them to participate in the elections. There are other instances where a candidate has been elected while himself in detention and not yet released. Thus Ravi Narayan Reddi, the leader of the Telengana peasants' struggle (with which the readers of *Labour Monthly* are well acquainted) was elected to the Central Parliament from Nalgonda with 309,162 votes against 96,837 of the Congress, while he was released from detention hardly a fortnight before the polling day.

Premier Nehru has declared in the course of his election tours that Hyderabad was to be the test case. He was mainly referring to Telengana, where the Congress had been engaged in its 'liberating' mission for the last three years, with the aid of batons and bullets, and its agrarian programme of reinstating the landlords in an area where the peasants had distributed one million acres among themselves. In the whole of this Telengana area, the People's Democratic Front (P.D.F.) contested 46 out of about 90 seats. It has won 37 of these 46 seats and could easily have won more, but the prevailing terror, wholesale arrests and warrants of arrests made it impossible for the P.D.F. to contest more seats. In the two districts of Nalgonda and Warrangal, storm centres of the Telengana struggle, the P.D.F. has secured approximately 600,000 votes as against 200,000 of the Congress. For the Central Parliament the P.D.F. contested eight seats from Telengana, of which it has already won six with the certainty of winning another. The achievement of such striking results under these conditions of severe repression is evidence that the real strength of mass support is very much greater than the figures reveal.

Another interesting sidelight of this election is the debacle of the 'Socialist' Party, the official exponent of the 'third force' conception in India. True to their counterpart in this country, they refused to enter into any united front with the Communist and other Left parties, thus paving the way for the Congress victory in many cases. In Bombay, their stronghold, the Socialist Party successfully split the democratic votes, leading to the 80 per cent

victory of the Congress. In Telengana, however, all their candidates have forfeited their deposits. In Travancore-Cochin, where they have secured 12 seats as against 37 of the Left United Front (in a House of 108), it will be interesting to observe whether their anti-Communism leads them to a 'united front' with the Congress, in which contingency alone a Congress Government is possible in this State.

All democrats and all patriots and friends of India abroad will demand that the verdict of the people must be carried out, and that all democratic political parties should be given full facilities to function unhampered by any restrictions. It is essential that there should be legalisation of the Communist Party in Hyderabad and Travancore-Cochin and withdrawal of the warrants against and release of all its workers. The victory of the democratic forces in the Indian elections has strengthened the cause of Peace and Democracy all over the world. It is yet another nail in the coffin of the warmongers who fondly dreamed of making India a base of operation against the glorious Chinese and Soviet Peoples.

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N.B.—*Owing to changes in international postal rates, these Air-mail figures are valid only for this issue of the magazine.*

* See "Oppression in India," by D. N. Pritt, Q.C., in July, 1950, and Reddi's letter printed in the *L.M.* issue of May, 1951.