

From the South

On the Eve of the Andhra Elections

HE would be a bold man who could predict confidently the outcome of the general elections in Andhra which, as these lines are being written, have got off to a start. The elections in this, the newest State in the Union, have a significance far beyond that of the government of a unit in a large federation. Andhra is a test case in a sense for the protagonists of linguistic States as well as for those who hope for or fear the advent of communism in India. The stability and success of the democratic method which that State is able to achieve is bound to influence the decision about further reorganisation of States on a linguistic basis. So far Andhra has, from this point of view, proved a disappointment, in the last 18 months there has been as sorry a spectacle as any, of political manoeuvrings and jockeying for power. It would be recalled that just on the eve of the formation of the State, Shri Prakasani left the Praja Socialist Party. The creation of the Praja wing of this party in this part of the country had been almost wholly his own. His leaving the PSP made the way clear for him to head the ministry in a coalition based largely on Congress support. With the defection of Shri Viswanathan from the PSP, that party was split beyond repair and the youthful P V G Raju (the Raja of Vizianagaram in racing and golf circles!) emerged as its spokesman. The fact of the largest zamindar in the State heading a Socialist Party and even courting arrest on the I nam tenants issue does not seem to have appeared incongruous to the PSP leadership, though the humour of it was not lost on the Andhra public and the propaganda value of it not missed by the Communists. The Krishak Lok Party (KLP), after a trial honeymoon with the coalition when Shri Latchanna was in the ministry, was also split with the defection of Shri Thimma Reddi to the Congress. The contagion of schisms spread even to the Communist Party and some of their able workers, including a few Assembly members, left the party to form a small group of their own"; in their case at least it could be said the deserters were not rewarded with the crumbs of office. Thus with the Congress demoralised after the 1952 elections and the KLP and PSP in pieces as a result of defections, despite their good showing at the 1952 elections, the situation

was deteriorating rapidly enough to raise the gorge of the Andhra public—not exactly a patient people. A snap vote on Prohibition ended in defeat for the Government and when on the top of earlier defeats (on the University and High Court issues) the Government still clung to power, a no confidence motion tabled by Shri Latchanna (himself an ex-minister) was carried, supported, it may be added, by an office bearer of the Congress, Shri Sankara Reddi—a former Congress minister in Madras and a PSP nominee in the present election!

The period of Governor's rule has been uneventful—a wag even remarked that in Andhra that was an event—and preparations have gone on for the present elections where over 11 million voters will go to the polls to elect 193 members out of 573 candidates, 3 Congress nominees already having been returned.

The elections in Andhra are of interest for it will be a direct trial of strength between the United Congress Party comprising of the Congress, the KLP and Praja parties on the one side and the Communists on the other. The alliance of the former is basically electoral and it is odd to think that the Praja Party and KLP, both of which were splinter groups from the Congress, are now working with it. The alliance, however, is not without its stresses and strains. That is bound to be so when the original breaks were more on personal grounds rather than on principles. Even among the Congress members there are group, district and caste rivalries; there is also the difference of opinion between those members of the Congress who wanted to 'go it alone' and those who were prepared to go to any length to ensure Communist defeat. While the generous ascribed the motives of the former to a strict adherence to political scruples, the critical discerned an attempt to discredit the leaders of the party responsible for the alliance.

Behind this political jigsaw, there stands out one factor—the elections will probably be decided not so much by economic and political factors but by group loyalties and caste influences. While the United Congress Party (UCP) has been infected with this view to a considerable extent, even the Communists are not

above it. The Kapus (Reddis) and the Kamrnas (who sometimes sport the name 'Choudhary') are the two main groups and the division of votes might be decided more on the caste pattern than by economic arguments or political principles. The UCP has generally been careful to select its candidates with this consideration in mind; the Communists, too, have adapted themselves to the social base—their way of saying that generally their candidate is from the major caste group. A notable exception to this is Shri Sundarayya (a Kapu) who is reported to be standing in a constituency which though normally Communist in leanings may not have a Kapu majority. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that this particular constituency would be a pointer to whether caste or other arguments will finally prevail.

This interest has been further heightened by the arrival in Andhra and the campaigning done by the

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