

## Parties Between the Elections

**National Politics and 1957 Elections in India** Edited by S L Poplai. Published by The Diwan Chand Indian Information Centre in cooperation with the Indian Council of World Affairs. Metropolitan Book Company, Private Ltd. Delhi 1957. Pp. 153. Appendices p 157 p 172. Price Kg 4.

THE biggest elections in the worlds history do not seem to have excited the social scientist and no team finally came out from the States to study the Indian elections from different aspects, equipped with the latest techniques of mass communication and opinion survey. This is surprising indeed particularly the lack of any interest on the part of the American foundations. The volume that has come out at long last under the joint editorship of Professor Richard Park and Professor S V Kogekar (to be reviewed) is not what it had been expected to be a major study undertaken on an appropriate scale, though behind it there was a small grant from some American foundation too small, it turned out, even to cover the minimum of clerical and other expenses and the Indian Political Association. For a proper scientific study of all-India elections with 190 million voters, an elaborate organisation would be necessary and the study should have begun right from the preparation of electoral rolls, and covered all the important stages through which the elections progressed factors that influence the election programmes of the different parties, the part played by the Press and other instruments for forming public opinion, etc, right down to the analysis of the final results. But on whatever scale the study is made, it can only be undertaken by an organisation; the job is beyond the capacity of any one individual.

Since no one responded to the challenge, the humble effort put forward by the Diwan Chand Indian Information Centre in the form of a timely publication "National Politics and 1957 elections in India" is to be welcomed. It brings together the election manifestos of the major political parties, policy statements by spokesmen of these parties, and the texts of the documents on electoral alliances between the parties. There is an informative introduction covering the first 46 pages in which Shri S'sir Gupta gives an analysis of the changing position of the parties between the two elections. There are interesting appendices on bye-elections held between the

general elections in which the results are analysed in detail and on the procedure for selecting party candidates.

In the foreward it is explained that the book is intended to be a work of reference which will "not merely help the electors to clarify their ideas" but will also be indispensable "for those who attempt an analysis of the elections after they are over". Though the publication has been brought out "in co-operation with the Indian Council of World Affairs", the only evidence of co-operation is a short preface from the Secretary General of that august body. Surely, the Indian Council of World Affairs should have done a little more beyond just lending its name to the publication, to make its cooperation more convincing.

The Introduction begins appropriately with the results of the first general elections in which the Congress party won 75 per cent of the seats at the Centre but only 44.4 per cent of the votes cast and more than two-thirds of the seats in the State Assemblies on 41.9 per cent of the votes. However, though the Congress towered above the other parties, it was not so strong in Madras, Travancore-Cochin and Rajas than.

How has this position changed? An answer to this question is generally sought in the trend of the bye-elections. But in India there are a few difficulties. First, bye-elections are fought on local issues. The Congress lost two Assembly seats in West Bengal following the Bihar-Bengal merger proposals. A few seats were lost by it in U P on the question of irrigation rates. Second, opposition parties, whose resources are slender, can more effectively concentrate their efforts in bye-elections and hold their own. This they cannot do in all-India elections. The bye-elections therefore cannot be taken as a guide to the possible result of general elections.

The analysis of party position drives home one point clearly: the weakening of the opposition parties and consolidation of both the strength and prestige of the Con-

gress. The lead given by the Congress party in initiating economic development, the success of the First Plan and the formulation of the Second, with its emphasis on heavy industries, have taken the wind out of the opposition's sails. There have been desertions in the ranks of the opposition parties and additions to the Congress party's membership. Those among the opposition who have not renounced their respective party affiliations, no longer differ from the Congress, at least not basically.

The Avadi resolution of Congress to usher in a "socialistic pattern of society" led to a reevaluation of the Congress by the opposition parties. The Krishikar Lok Party of N G Ranga and the Forward Bloc re-entered the parent fold. Many stalwarts of the P S P rejoined the Congress. Even the Communist party recognised that the land-lord dominated Congress was gaining strength and abandoned its 'crisis-is-inevitable' line. Jana Sangha, though it criticises the Second Plan as over-ambitious and socialism as inimical to the Hindu way of life, has a reduced following and suffered in prestige. This then is the state of the opposition.

The overwhelming strength of the Congress, however, has led the opposition parties to devise some ways and means. Jaya Prakssh Narayan advocated alliances between parties of the left, in order to avoid triangular contests and splitting of opposition votes. The Communists responded to the suggestion, but Jaya Prakarhs own party, the P S P, would have no truck with the Communists. Finally the term 'alliances' was abandoned in favour of 'adjustments' to which all leftist parties agreed, except Dr Lohia and his Socialist Party.

There have been some 'alliances'. In Bombay State, the opposition parties are fighting the Congress jointly under the auspices of the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti, and the Maha Gujarat Samiti, the common aim or the latter being the division of bilingual Bombay into two separate states, Maharashtra and Gujarat. In Bengal the P S P-

C P I-R S P alliance claims to have evolved a common programme to work upon after winning the elections. Curiously enough, the P S P has aligned with the communal Muslim League in Malabar. A Democratic Front of the C P I-R S P-S C F and other leftist groups are fighting the Congress in U P. The P S P, however, has kept out of it.

These are some of the 'declared' adjustments. There have been some undeclared ones. The parties of the opposition are conscious of their limited resources. They are, therefore, putting up only winners to avoid triangular contests. It is this consciousness of the opposition parties on which Shri Gupta bases his conclusion that "opposition may not fare as badly in the forthcoming elections as the political history of the last five years would suggest". Let us see.



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