

Review Report
On 1996 General Elections
Adopted By The Central Committee, July 27-29, 1996

The elections to the 11th Lok Sabha have resulted, as widely expected, in no single party or formation winning a majority. The election results are notable for the decisive defeat suffered by the ruling Congress which got the lowest percentage of votes and seats since the first general elections in 1952. It has also led, disturbingly, to the emergence of the BJP as the single largest party, though well short of a majority. The non-Congress, non-BJP secular parties constitute a significant bloc in the Lok Sabha. In the present correlation of forces within parliament, the regional parties have acquired a prominent role given the fact that no national party is in a position to dominate or muster a majority.

The election results reveal that the decline in the Congress(I)'s mass base which began from the 1989 Lok Sabha elections continues. The 1989 and 1991 elections saw the end of the single party dominance of the Congress. The current Lok Sabha elections have led to a sharp decrease of 6.7 percent in its vote and its seats coming down to 142, the lowest ever in the history of the party. This erosion of support is a direct result of the impact of the reactionary economic policies initiated by the Rao government, its compromising approach to the communal forces and the high level corruption which it spawned. The infighting and revolts within the Congress contributed to the debacle.

Such a comprehensive defeat of the Congress should have paved the way for the advance of the Left, democratic and secular forces. However, it is the reactionary BJP with its communal platform which gained the most from the Congress's decline. Though it could not substantially increase its voting percentage (it has registered only a marginal increase of 0.7% from 20.1% to 20.8%), it has won 160 seats and emerged for the first time as the single largest party in the Lok Sabha. This allowed it to stake its claim to form the government. Alongwith its allies the Shiv Sena, Samata Party and the Haryana Vikas Party and its post-poll ally the Akalis, the formation led by the BJP has a strength of 194. Caste identity and mobilisation on sub-caste basis has led to casteism playing a widespread role in electoral mobilisation.

The combination representing the third force which comprised the Janata Dal, the Left parties and the Samajwadi Party did not fare as

well as we expected. It got 113 seats. Alongwith the regional parties which were allied to the Left, like the AGP and the TDP, the total comes to 134. The main setback was in Bihar where the JD, Left combination lost nearly half the seats held previously.

The success of the DMK and the TMC which defeated the Congress and its ally the AIADMK in Tamilnadu gave it a bloc of 37 seats. These two parties alongwith the TDP and the AGP represent a substantial force who came to play an important role in the post-election scenario.

The elections were held at a crucial time for the country. As the central committee's report on political developments adopted in January 1996 at Madras had stated :

"As the crucial Lok Sabha elections, to be held in April, draw near, it is clear that the country is faced with four major problems. They are : (1) the disastrous impact of the imperialist dictated economic policies endangering economic sovereignty and ruining the lives of the people; (2) the communal danger and its divisive impact on national unity; (3) the separatist movements which enable imperialist penetration; (4) corrosive corruption and criminalisation of politics.

"The policies of Narasimha Rao government and the communal politics of the BJP both representing different facets of the ruling classes are mainly responsible for the aggravation of these problems. How the four challenges are met politically will determine the future course of direction for the country.....In line with the Party Congress direction, our efforts have been geared towards the forging of an effective third alternative which can electorally contest and defeat the Congress(I) and the BJP."

It is in the light of this understanding that we should review the results of the elections and our party's role and intervention in the electoral struggle.

Congress Defeat

The defeat of the Congress represents the continuation and intensification of the trend witnessed during the assembly elections in some of the major states held in the intervening period. The successive defeats of the Congress in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, Maharashtra and Gujarat were a precursor to the defeat in the general elections. The defeat in the Lok Sabha elections represents a rejection

of the policies pursued by the Congress government particularly due to the adverse impact of its economic policies on the people, its compromise with the communal forces and high level corruption. The Congress party not only lost the majority it had acquired by defections after the 1991 Lok Sabha elections but its vote has got eroded in most of the states. Only in Orissa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and to a smaller extent in West Bengal, did it gain in terms of percentage of votes. Its performance has been disastrous in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, M.P, Tamilnadu and Punjab. In the state assembly elections held along with the parliament elections it lost power in Assam, Haryana and Kerala where it had state governments.

The election results show that the party continues to be spurned by the minorities by and large, except in some areas where the BJP threat exists and it is the only other choice. Even here when it came to the question of voting for the Congress as the lesser evil, the turn out was low among the minorities. The squeezing of the poor due to the policies of liberalisation have led to large scale desertion of the rural and urban poor from the Congress. In states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab, the BSP has severely eroded the traditional scheduled caste base of the Congress. The loss of the largest number of seats from Tamilnadu, is ofcourse due to the wave against Jayalalitha, with whom the party had allied.

Though the Congress(I) suffered a severe defeat in the elections, it will be wrong to write it off as a political force. It is still the biggest national political party with nearly 30 percent vote with an all-India spread. Further it has come second in 247 seats.

BJP Performance

The BJP has gained over 40 seats from its 1991 tally to emerge as the largest single party. However, this has been achieved not due to any substantial increase in its voting percentage which has gone up only by less than 1 percent according to preliminary estimates. The main gain of the BJP have been either due to the division in the Congress as in Madhya Pradesh where it increased its seats by 15; or due to the strength accruing by alliances like in Bihar with the Samata Party and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. These three states together gave the BJP an increase of 41 seats.

But the growth of the BJP's influence both in terms of its spread to new areas and its consolidation in its strong bases must not be underestimated. The BJP has consolidated its position in Uttar Pradesh,

Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi which are its traditional areas. It has made new gains in Assam and Orissa where its voting percentage has gone up substantially (16.3 percent and 13.3 percent respectively). It has also slightly improved its percentage in Gujarat though it lost seats there. In Haryana and Tripura it has improved its votes tally. In the North it is only in Punjab and Himachal that it has not been able to improve on its 1991 performance. However, it is in the south that it has failed to do well. In Karnataka where it has its strongest base in the south, its growth was contained and its vote percentage reduced by 2 percent. Similarly in Andhra Pradesh also it decreased. In Tamilnadu and Kerala it registered a small increase.

Taken overall, it is a fact that the BJP is the only national party which has made steady advance since the 1989 elections. In that sense the outcome of the 1996 elections must be seen as a continuation of this trend. Its support has grown in its major states at the expense of the Congress where a combination of anti-Congress popular discontent, penetration of the communal ideology and skilful organisational work backed by the RSS, have together contributed to the BJP's growth. To project its Hindutva platform, the BJP campaigned on issues like Article 370 on Kashmir, uniform civil code and infiltration from Bangladesh. At the same time it took up the economic issues and corruption which alienated the people from the Congress to cash in on the mass discontent even though its basic economic policy is no different.

It is not sufficient to see the BJP's growing influence purely in terms of the instant impact of the communal appeal on the electorate. Underlying the penetration of the communal ideology is the vast organisational work which is being undertaken by the various outfits of the RSS. The Saraswati Sishu Vidyalayas (kindergartens) and other educational institutions run by the RSS are an expanding network in many states; behind its success in South Bihar which has a big adivasi population there is the work of an organisation like the Vanavasi Kalyan Parishad, an RSS outfit which has been working primarily to counter the influence of the Christian missionaries. It is through this organisation that the RSS has made inroads among the adivasis in Bihar, M.P, Rajasthan and now in Orissa. It is significant that the BJP is penetrating most in Orissa in the backward tribal areas using both the feudal/royal politicians and the work of the RSS. The RSS is also assisting the BJP to organise people on caste and sub-caste lines. Holding of caste conferences, organisations of different sub-castes, taking up their specific problems, ensuring that tickets are distributed to the prominent people in these communities, are all planned by the RSS in order to widen the social base of the BJP. These type of activities are very evident in states like U.P. where the BJP gets

substantial votes from certain castes belonging to the OBCs and the scheduled castes. Everywhere, the BJP as a classic reactionary party seeks to divert the discontent generated by the bourgeois- landlord system into divisive channels of communal and caste consciousness.

Apart from conducting the anti-communal political campaign and ideological struggle, it is necessary to understand how the RSS-BJP combination works and concretely analyse which sections it is penetrating. This work must be undertaken by the Party committees if their influence is to be countered and our work in these areas developed.

The Third Alternative

The third force consisted of the combination of the Janata Dal, the Left parties and the Samajwadi party. This combination was forged after a protracted struggle and a long delay. The main reason being the difficulties in bringing together the Janata Dal and the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh. Their alliance was eventually forged only at the end of March, practically on the eve of the elections. This led to a delay in projecting this combination and also in preparing and issuing a joint appeal. The Janata Dal has its strength confined only to three states, Bihar, Karnataka and Orissa. Its maximum number of MPs were from Bihar in 1991. This time, the Janata Dal strength went down from 32 to 22 in Bihar and the JD and allies could get only 26 seats out of the total of 54. In Orissa it lost further ground and won only 4 out of the 20 seats. It is only in Karnataka that the Janata Dal could improve its position significantly. The Left parties could only maintain their position, though there was a marginal decrease in the total strength from 56 to 54. Thus the third force could only acquire the third position after the BJP and the Congress(I).

The other parties with which the CPI(M) and Left allied did well in the elections. In Andhra Pradesh, the TDP (Naidu group) won 16 seats and polled 34.2 percent of the votes thereby establishing itself as the main TDP party; the Laxmi Parvathi group was routed and failed to win a single seat. The Congress could win 22 out of the 42 seats despite a decrease in its vote percent of 4.7 percent only because of the TDP and Left votes split by the Laxmi Parvathi group. In Assam, the AGP and its ally CPI(M) won 6 out of the 14 seats while the Congress could win only 5. In Tamilnadu the gamble by Narasimha Rao in aligning with the AIADMK against the wishes of the state leadership led to the combination of the DMK and TMC emerging. This alliance became the focus for the anti- Jayalalitha discontent and it was able to sweep the

elections. The DMK-TMC-CPI alliance won all the 39 seats in the state.

In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP won 52 out of 85 seats getting around 34% of the vote. The non-BJP secular vote was sharply divided between the SP and the BSP. If the votes of the SP-JD-Left and the BSP are combined then the BJP would have lost 35 out of the 52 seats it won. An important feature of the UP elections is the increase in the BSP vote which polled 20.6 percent of the total vote.

Minorities Trend

The minorities have generally voted against the Congress wherever there was a viable secular alternative against the BJP. It is only in those areas where the fight was between the BJP and Congress that the minorities chose the latter. However, in these places also there was manifest reluctance to vote for the Congress among the general Muslim voters with a large section preferring to stay away from voting. Another feature noticed was the low turnout of the Muslim members in states where they had no confidence that there was an effective electoral force to defeat the BJP. In Bombay- Bhiwandi in Maharashtra and in many places in UP, Rajasthan and M.P the low turnout of the Muslims can be ascribed to their inability to see a strong third alternative to bank upon. The split of the secular forces between the SP and BSP was one such reason. The inability of the Party to attract Muslim votes in a substantial number in many places where we contested is a matter of concern. The consciousness of the minority community is focused mainly on their security and the Party's links with the Muslim masses are still very weak. The growth of fundamentalist forces within the community, as a reaction to majority communalism, and due to patronage from abroad, also acts as a barrier. We continue to neglect the special steps necessary to be taken to forge the Party and mass organisations' links with the Muslim masses. This shortcoming has to be removed.

Our tactical line for the elections

The political resolution of the 15th Congress had directed that "**The CPI(M) and the Left must try for an understanding with the secular opposition parties to present an effective alternative to the Congress and the BJP. The Left alone cannot, in the present situation defeat both these forces. The secular opposition parties have though constrained by the absence of a coherent programme, an important role in projecting the immediate electoral alternative.**" It is on the basis of this understanding that the

Central Committee of the party worked out the line of mobilising all the Left, democratic and secular opposition forces for forging a wider unity to present a third alternative to the Congress and the BJP. The Central Committee worked out its concrete electoral tactics after assessing the situation prevailing after the assembly elections in some of the major states. Though the Janata Dal-National Front was in disarray, the growing discontent of the people against the Congress resulted in the victory of the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh and the Janata Dal in Karnataka and Bihar assembly elections. This opened the possibility for a third force comprising the National Front, Left and their allies. Given the situation, our Party decided that the efforts to forge the third alternative should go beyond the framework of the old National Front-JD, Left combination. There were other major parties like the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, the AGP in Assam and some other regional forces who should be brought together to forge the widest unity. Based on the understanding formulated in the July CC meeting of 1995, our Party leadership continuously worked for the alliance between the Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party and the Left parties in Uttar Pradesh in view of the vital importance of the state in the fight against the BJP. Our Party leadership intervened to see that the Janata Dal finally adopted a position to facilitate such a wider unity. However, the efforts for such a wider unity were protracted and came at such a late stage that the projection of a third alternative could not be achieved in the manner we wished.

While we were making these efforts the split in the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh was a setback. It resulted in divergent views between the Left on the one hand and the J.D with the latter deciding to go alongwith the Laxmi Parvati group. Our Party adopted essentially correct tactics in relation to the complex situation that arose in Andhra Pradesh. We continued to appeal for unity to fight the Congress while deciding to ally with the majority group of the TDP led by Chandrababu Naidu. The election results have vindicated our assessment.

In Assam after discussions in the Central Committee and the state committee, we decided to have an electoral understanding with the AGP for the first time, taking into account the fact that the AGP had changed some of its old positions against the minorities and keeping in mind the necessity to prevent an alliance between the AGP and the BJP. Our success in working out correct tactics in Assam resulted in the AGP being brought within the framework for wider secular unity and in enabling the defeat of the Congress in the state. In Bihar, Karnataka and Orissa, despite various problems, we finally arrived at an understanding about seats with the Janata Dal even though Biju Patnaik in Orissa and Laloo Prasad in Bihar were adopting a negative

approach to the question of allotting us a reasonable number of seats. In Maharashtra, the CPI, CPI(M) and P.W.P which had formed a Left alliance was able to have a wider understanding with the Janata Dal, R.P.I , Kamgar Aghadi and the Samajwadi Party. In Punjab, the CPI() and the CPI decided to fight the elections jointly as they were against any alliance with the Akalis.

These steps represent a degree of success in drawing together a number of secular bourgeois parties and allies so that the third alternative could be widened and strengthened. However, such a combination was forged on the eve of the elections. A joint appeal was formulated only after the elections were announced and hence it could not be projected effectively as a cohesive alternative. Given the past experience of the people with such alliances at the national level, requisite confidence could not be created that it would be a stable entity. Even the alliance between the JD and SP led to a revolt in the shrunken U.P Janata Dal with a number of its activists leaving the party. In such a situation, despite the success of the combination in states like Karnataka, Assam and partially in Andhra Pradesh and the Left success in its three states, the overall performance could not reach the level of being able to outpace the BJP and the Congress.

In Tamilnadu, our Party could not go with the DMK after it became clear that it was keeping its options open for an understanding with the Congress and playing down its opposition to the Congress government's policies. We allied with the MDMK and the Janata Dal. The DMK on the eve of the elections made a public offer to the Congress expressing its willingness to have an understanding if it breaks with the AIADMK. The overwhelming majority of the state unit of the Congress was also prepared for this. However, Narasimha Rao decided at the last moment to go alongwith Jayalalitha and her party thereby sparking off a major revolt which led to the formation of the Tamil Maanila Congress. The unparalleled record of corruption and misrule of Jayalalitha led to a massive upsurge to which all opposition parties had contributed. But the combination of the DMK-TMC which was also supported by Rajnikant became the focus for the massive anti-Jayalalitha mass sentiment. This resulted in a big sweep for the DMK-TMC alliance. Our combination and other parties got completely squeezed out.

Reviewing the party's line in Tamilnadu we cannot attribute any mistake in our decision not to go with the DMK, given the fact that till the last moment, the DMK was prepared to have an understanding with the Congress. With such an approach of the DMK, our Party could not have compromised its position by committing to any alliance with it.

Our Party's Performance

The CPI(M) and the Left-led alliance won the elections in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. In the assembly elections in West Bengal and Kerala, the Left Front and the LDF were victorious. But overall, the Party could not increase its strength in the Lok Sabha.

The CPI(M) contested 76 seats including independents supported by the Party. We have won 33 seats (including 1 independent) According to preliminary estimates the Party has polled 6.2 percent of the total valid votes which is the same as in the 1991 elections. The Party's gains were in Tripura where we won both the seats with big margins; in Kerala where we held 4 seats previously we were able to win 6 this time including one independent supported by us; in West Bengal, we have won 23 which is less by 4 from the previous tally of 27. We have retained the sitting Barpeta seat in Assam. We have won a new seat Khamman in Andhra Pradesh but lost the sitting Miryalguda seat. We have lost sitting seats in Nawadah (Bihar); Bhubaneshwar (Orissa) and Wardha (Maharashtra).

West Bengal

In West Bengal the assembly elections were held alongwith the Lok Sabha polls. The Left Front has been voted back to office with a two-thirds majority for an unprecedented 5th successive term. The CPI(M) has won 150 seats in the assembly while the Left Front has won 245. The Congress improved its strength to 82 compared to 43 in 1991. The Left Front polled 49.3 percent of the vote this time which is 0.5 percent more than in the 1991 elections. The Congress(I) vote went up by 3.2 percent while the BJP vote declined by 4.9 percent. In the Lok Sabha polls the Left Front vote was marginally less than its assembly percentage while the Congress vote is marginally more than its assembly percentage. The BJP vote has substantially declined by 4.9 percent. The bulk of this vote has gone to the Congress which has tilted the balance in favour of the Congress in many marginal seats.

The fact that the Left Front won a two-thirds majority and improved its percentage over 1991 after being in government for nearly 20 years is a significant and noteworthy achievement. Despite the negative factors which accumulated after years of office in a system which is controlled by the ruling class at the Centre and despite the hostility of the media and the reactionary circles, it is no small achievement to retain the peoples confidence. The Party and the Left alliance led by it

has come out successful in the electoral struggle and enhanced its prestige all over the country. The West Bengal State Committee organised an intensive political campaign in a planned manner from October 1995 itself ranging from group meetings to district rallies. 12 pamphlets were published with an average sale of 3 lakh copies each. The Ganashakti also played an important role in the campaign.

At the same time, we should note the weakness and shortcomings. The review of the state committee pinpoints some of these factors such as instances of corruption, difficulties in the health, education and rural electrification departments, flouting of guidelines on the functioning of local bodies and so on. The alienation of the urban middle class due to some of the above factors and the discontent among the educated unemployed youth have eroded the Party's support in the urban areas. While the bulk of the working class and the Muslim minorities have voted with the Left, some degree of erosion is visible in certain areas. In some of the industrial areas of Calcutta, Hooghly, Howrah and 24 Parganas, the review notes the reduction in support among the workers. We must investigate why there was some erosion of support among the Muslim masses in some places particularly in the urban areas. Problems of the Muslim minorities regarding employment and education may have been utilised by the Congress to make inroads in certain pockets of Muslim minorities.

Kerala

The victory of the LDF in the Kerala assembly and parliament election is a significant contribution to the Left's electoral performance. In the assembly, the CPI(M) has won 44 seats and the LDF has got an absolute majority winning 80 seats. In the Lok Sabha from a tally of 4 for the LDF in 1991, this time the LDF won 10 seats with the CPI(M) winning 6. In terms of percentage of votes the total percentage of votes polled came down this time in Kerala by 2.4 percent. This led to the LDF percentage coming down by 1.1 percent while the UDF percentage came down by 4.4 percent. The difference between the LDF and the UDF vote is only 1,68,690 (i.e. 1.15 percent). In the Lok Sabha elections, the UDF got 0.75 percent votes more than the LDF. The LDF won because of the popular discontent against the UDF rule which resulted in deterioration in the people's living standards due to price rise and unemployment, state taxes in the industrial and agricultural fronts, privatisation of education, corruption and growing atrocities on women. There was also disunity among the opponents of the LDF. The three way division in the League vote, the opposition of the Nair Service Society and a section of the SNDP and Dheevara Sabha contributed to the erosion of the UDF strength. In pursuing our tactical

line, the Party had no truck with the communal parties. However, in a few places known INL persons were put up as independents whom we supported. This was not in conformity with the approach to the INL decided for the elections.

It must also be examined whether the independent projection of the Party's political line and policies have been sufficiently undertaken. This is connected to the fact that for a considerable period of time the expansion of the mass base of the Party has been marking time. The electoral division of seats in the LDF has remained stationary over the decades whereby our Party cannot contest or win a majority of the seats.

The election review of the Kerala state committee notes that we have not been able to make any substantial headway in winning the masses following the UDF or increasing our votes among the new sections. The review states : "Compared to 1991, in 1996, the LDF got only 34,172 votes more this time when the increase of 4,17,246 in polled votes is considered. This shows that our mass base has not been broadened inspite of the favourable situation. What the voting figures have shown is that the innumerable agitations we have conducted during the last five years and the large number of magnificent struggles conducted by various class and mass organisations with many a sacrifice did not succeed in making substantial change in the correlation of forces". The review further points out the organisational weaknesses of the Party which can be a major factor in our inability to translate the favourable political situation into our increased electoral influence. The unhealthy inner-Party organisational situation marked by groupism for some time in Kerala has weakened the organisation and its live links with the masses. An intensive political- ideological campaign and steps to remove the ills plaguing the organisation have to be taken up if we have to consolidate and advance further the Party and the Left forces in the state. Special attention has to be paid for planning political-ideological campaigns among the minorities by the Party.

Tripura

In Tripura, our Party has won both the seats polling more than 50 percent of the vote. In West Tripura we polled 50.4 percent and in East Tripura 54%. These results reflect our success in consolidating the political influence gained in the recent period after the assembly elections of 1993. The elections were conducted in a period when there is a serious threat to the ethnic unity of the tribal and non-tribal people. Our Party and the Left had to launch a big political campaign

against the tribal extremists and Bengali chauvinists to defend communal amity. The break up of the Congress(I)-TUJS alliance contributed further to our success. The loss of support among middle classes in the sub-divisional centres which was seen also during the municipal elections has been noted by the state committee. The extremist attacks have contributed to a sense of insecurity among the Bengali middle-classes which has been cashed in by the Congress with its anti-tribal stance. Our government's performance has to be reviewed to see how the causes for their alienation can be removed. The BJP's vote has gone up and it was able to get 6.5 percent of the vote. Tackling the BJP by effective political campaign must be paid attention to. The Party will have to continue to pay close attention to the problems of achieving ethnic unity and to politically mobilise the people to be vigilant against all provocations.

Apart from these three strong states, the electoral performance of the Party in the rest of the country is generally unsatisfactory. There are some exceptions like our performance in Khamman in Andhra Pradesh. However, in most places, we have not been able to break new ground or gain sufficient electoral support. The main feature is of stagnation in our electoral base or in some places even decline.

Hindi Region

The electoral position of the Party in the Hindi speaking states should be of particular concern. In Bihar, in the two seats that we contested this time, just as in 1991, the votes polled have come down substantially. The gains made by the BJP-Samata alliance overall represents a reactionary shift. The discontent engineered by the Laloo Prasad government's misrule and the casteist approach are the main causes for the negative reaction. The Left as a whole has got eroded in Bihar and the sharp polarisation is effecting the strong basis of the Left parties too. The CPI which is the biggest Left party in Bihar has lost four out of the 8 seats it had and the CPI(M) has lost its only sitting seat.

In Uttar Pradesh, the Left as a whole has been marginalised. The CPI which has been the stronger party has been in progressive decline and for the first time it got a lesser voting percentage than the CPI(M) with the two parties together polling only 1 percent of the total vote contesting four seats. The CPI(M) in its two seats could improve its overall vote compared to 1991, polling nearly 3 lakh votes. In Varanasi we got 1.5 lakh votes and in Kanpur 1.46 lakh votes. But in both these seats which are predominantly urban, the BJP hold has further strengthened.

In Rajasthan, we contested only one seat, Sikar, where we got 56,000 votes. We could not contest the other seat, Bikaner as our candidate decided to withdraw on the last date of withdrawal without consulting the Party. In this seat, last time we had polled over 80,000 votes. In Madhya Pradesh, the Party contested Rewa seat. Here again the acute caste division and polarisation led to our candidate polling only 12,000 votes. In Haryana we contested a parliament seat for the first time in Hissar and our candidate who could not get the symbol due to a technical flaw polled a respectable 56,000 vote. In Himachal Pradesh too we contested the Lok Sabha seat for the first time (Shimla, SC seat) and polled 19,600 votes. In Delhi also we contested for the first time a Lok Sabha seat, Karol Bagh, and polled over 11,000 votes.

Other States

In Andhra Pradesh, the Party contested three seats polling nearly 9 lakh votes. In Khammam we polled 3.74 lakh votes and won the seat with a margin of. We got 3.12 lakh votes in Miryalagudam and lost by 43 thousand votes. In Nellore we polled 2.01 lakh votes. In Punjab, the Party contested 3 seats in which we polled 2,36,993 votes. The highest vote was in Sangrur where we got 1.56 lakh votes. In the Union Territory of Chandigarh we contested for the first time and polled only 6030 votes. In Maharashtra, we contested 3 seats. We lost the sitting Wardha seat and came third this time. In Dahanu, in the adivasi belt we polled 1,36,000 votes an increase of 26,000 over 199 but we had expected to do much better on the basis of the votes the SP and JD had polled in the Bhiwandi segment where there is a large minority population. In Ichalakaranji we polled 80,000 votes. In Bhubaneswar, our sitting seat, we polled 2.19 lakh votes and lost the seat to the Congress. In Karnataka, we contested the Bidar seat with an understanding with the Janata Dal. We polled 72 thousand votes. Our performance was limited by the fact that the Party has no organisation in most of the assembly segments.

Problem Of Casteism

In the Hindi speaking region, the twin processes of communal polarisation and caste based mobilisation has badly affected the Left forces. The secular bourgeois parties which are in the fray and who are the main forces to challenge the BJP rely primarily on caste based mobilisation to counter the BJP. The mobilisation of the backward castes and dalits on the slogan of social justice and lower caste assertion does represent a democratic aspect in that the socially

oppressed cases are asserting their rights and want a fair share in political decision making. However, devoid of a socio-economic programme of fighting the roots of social and caste oppression, caste-based politics only helps to perpetuate caste divisions and consciousness. With this becoming a widespread phenomenon, the reactionary parties like the BJP are also resorting to counter-caste mobilisation and appealing to the sectarian feelings of upper castes and sub-castes and communities. Both the Janata Dal in Bihar and the Samajwadi Party in U.P represent this phenomenon and the negative features of this politics is having its impact on the Left too. A closer look at the political and organisational problems within the CPI(M) would reveal the growth of caste consciousness within the Party ranks at different levels and erosion of the class bases of the Left. The Janata Dal in Bihar has made inroads into the Left's rural base while the BSP and the other parties have affected the Left's following in U.P on caste lines. We have so far not made serious efforts to counter the growing divisions on caste lines of the people.

While the caste polarisation and political mobilisation on caste and sub-caste lines is becoming an acute problem in the Hindi speaking states, such a trend is not confined here alone. Growing caste identity/consciousness and their electoral appeal on caste lines is growing in states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and so on in the non-Hindi regions too. While we continue to ally with the non-Congress secular bourgeois parties, the Party will have to seriously address the problem of casteism and its political and electoral implications. Here the Party's independent political-ideological stand on the caste question must be spelt out and widely propagated. The concrete situation in each state must be studied and proper tactics and slogans worked out so that the potential of the awakening of the communities subject to caste oppression is carried forward on democratic lines while the narrow, sectarian and opportunist electoral manifestations which lead to dividing the working people and disrupting class unity is properly countered. While seriously taking up the struggle for land and wages for the oppressed sections we must simultaneously fight against caste oppression. There has to be anti-caste propaganda as part of general political propaganda. Mass organisations must also take up the social problem of casteism and its evil manifestations. All this requires sustained political and ideological education of our Party ranks and mass campaigns where our stand on reservation, caste oppression, social evils arising out of caste system, are all tackled within the framework of the class approach and the Marxist standpoint on the relation between class and caste.

The failure to make any significant electoral advance in the country as

a whole over a long period, the inability to utilise the favourable situation of mass discontent against the bourgeois landlord policies of the Congress and the success of the BJP in such a situation does raise some basic questions. Some of these issues have been raised in the discussions in some of the state committees while reviewing the elections.

Critical Examination Required

Since 1991, we had conducted at the all-India level and in the states, a number of struggles and campaigns against the economic policies of the Rao government and played a leading role in the broad based resistance which has developed through formations like the National Platform of Mass Organisations. Similarly, our Party has been consistent in organising anti-communal campaigns and rallying the wider sections in defence of secularism. We have also been in the forefront in exposing the corruption scandals. Despite all these activities by the Party and the mass organisations we are not able to go beyond our existing areas and increase our electoral strength. This requires deeper consideration.

In those weaker states, where the Party has some presence and pockets of influence, our political tactical line enjoins us to forge alliances with the secular bourgeois parties which are opposed to the Congress and the BJP. Over a considerable period of time we have adopted concrete tactics which have resulted in alliances and joint election campaigns with the bourgeois parties who are stronger than us. The experience of how our Party has utilised these joint platforms and united fronts must be examined. In successive Party Congresses we have stressed the importance of developing the independent activities of the Party in the political-ideological and organisational spheres. We have set out the importance of increasing Left intervention and Left unity in the context of forging the wider alliance and for paving the way for the advance of the Left and democratic forces. However, both in mass movements and in elections such joint platforms and fronts have not led to the commensurate growth of the independent strength of the Party and its mass organisations. It is a common experience in many of the weaker states that our independent strength has stagnated or declined compared to the advance made by other bourgeois-landlord parties.

Lag in Independent Party Positions

In projecting the independent political line of the Party among the people, in taking ideological and class positions distinct from the bourgeois parties, the Party is lagging behind. When such wider alliances and joint fronts with other political parties are forged and this independent political ideological stand is absent or lagging, the Party's growth gets limited. It is difficult for the people to see the distinct identity of the Party.

Secondly, the call for independent activities of the party is often ritualistically observed in a formal manner without sufficient initiative taken at the grassroots level to take up the class and mass issues and launch struggles and movements. The capacity to take up independently issues by the Party and to wage militant struggles has been giving way to general campaigns and reliance on electoral tactics not very dissimilar to bourgeois parties. In such a situation the methods utilised by the bourgeois allies such as caste mobilisation, populist slogans devoid of a class content and tendency to tail behind the slogans of the dominant bourgeois partners is becoming increasingly manifest.

In such a situation, neither the Party's independent strength nor its electoral influence grows and the tendency to tail behind the bourgeois parties ends up in strengthening them and not the Party and the Left forces. How seriously the Party takes the task of projecting the independent political line of the Party, building up the all sided independent activities, political ideological and organisational and guarding against the tendency to tail behind the bourgeois parties must be seriously looked into. This will entail further self-critical examination of our political- tactical line since the 10th Congress particularly our experience in allying with the bourgeois parties both electorally and in general political terms.

At the organisational level, it must be examined why despite the considerable range of mass activities and movements conducted by the Party and the mass organisations, they have not found reflection in terms of the expansion of the mass strength of the Party. There has been some increase in the total votes polled by the Party in the 1996 parliament elections as compared to 1991. This increase is not substantial considering the overall increase of the electorate and the gains made by the reactionary party like the BJP. The state of the Party organisation at different levels is marked by various defects and weaknesses. These have been spelt out in the political-organisational

report and the report on organisation in the 14th Congress and the political organisation report of the 15th Congress. One of the defects which has been highlighted in the 15th Congress organisational review is the growing trend towards parliamentarism and its attendant opportunist and careerist manifestations.

Trend of Parliamentarism

The 15th Party Congress had warned about the growing parliamentary opportunism and bourgeois vices which have crept into the Party. The recent election experience on the organisational front has confirmed this analysis. In West Bengal, the review notes that factionalism in several constituencies caused great harm. One of the reasons attributed for factionalism and anti-Party activities in the elections is the discontent about not being nominated as Party candidates. The state committee has called for strict action against such persons or Party units. The West Bengal State Committee review notes "A dangerous trend was the anger that was created in those who were not provided the nomination they somehow expected. They kept on pressurising the Party on this account. Some went ahead to provide 'statements' to the bourgeois press that were full of distortions. We stress that the fact that supplementation of existing candidates with new incumbents did not have any negative impact on the electorate." In Kerala too the manifestations of parliamentarism has been seen in various forms which was taken note of at the Party Congress and subsequently. The Kerala review report states : "One tendency perceivable in the Party while deciding the candidates was the incidence of the growing parliamentary illusion. At certain places various types of bad tendencies to become the candidate came to the fore. The feeling that all these are permissible has grown. In certain constituencies the tendency to question the Party decision has appeared. These are to be viewed seriously." In Andhra Pradesh, in the Miryalguda constituency in Nalgonda district, factionalism reached a climax on the question of choice of candidate during the earlier assembly elections and now during the Lok Sabha elections. The outcome of this revolt has been disciplinary action taken against a number of district committee members and the exit of the Party's veteran leader B.N. Reddy who has now been expelled.

While thousands of our Party members and activists worked tirelessly and sincerely during the election campaign it is also a fact that in many states and constituencies we could not mobilise the entire membership of the Party to be active in the election campaign. From the review submitted by the state committees it is clear that in many

places only 50 percent of the Party membership became actively involved in a sustained fashion in the election work. If the Party members themselves cannot be activated in a major political campaign like during the elections, it shows an extremely low level of consciousness and a very bad state of the Party organisation. In some states like Bihar and UP, there is reluctance on the part of leading cadres to go and work during the elections in the constituencies where the Party is contesting. This localism is dictated by concern for remaining in their own areas with an eye to nurturing their own electoral constituencies or maintaining links with the allied party who is contesting. Another weakness noted is that in constituencies like Bhubaneswar, Nawadah, Wardha or Varanasi, despite contesting elections a number of times and having won the seats also, the Party organisation has not developed. No attention has been paid to developing the mass organisations and building the Party. Hence we are totally dependent on the bourgeois party allies to gather the votes for us. If they fail to do so, we are in a helpless plight. In most of these constituencies we were unable to man fifty percent of the polling booths with our volunteers.

Parliamentarism does not mean just some individuals hankering for elected posts. It also means neglecting the work of building the Party and the mass movements and perpetuating the illusion that electoral activity is the sole political activity by which the Party can grow. It is necessary to combine parliamentary and extra-parliamentary work so that the mass movements are strengthened on which basis the Party can be expanded.

Rectification Campaign

The problems of factionalism, group rivalries, individualism and careerism all testify to the growing corrosion of political consciousness and communist norms. The Party Congress direction for initiating a rectification campaign must be taken up immediately now that the elections are over. The next meeting of the Central Committee must discuss this matter in depth and decide how this campaign can be conducted inside the Party. This underlines the importance of the 15th Congress call for a rectification campaign within the Party to remove the wrong trends and defects in the organisation.

PB/CC

Guidelines For Elections

The Central Committee in its meeting in Madras in January 1996 had discussed and formulated certain guidelines for the selection of candidates. These were to be discussed in the state committees and given concrete shape. Based on this efforts were made to limit the number of terms of the MPs and MLAs. In Kerala the state secretariat/state committee discussed and decided that out of the 29 MLAs who had served more than 2 terms 12 would be given exemption to contest again. Similarly 3 comrades were recommended to re-contest the Lok Sabha elections. These proposals were forwarded to the P.B for approval and it was implemented accordingly. Out of the 86 candidates who contested the assembly and Lok Sabha elections, only 17 had more than 2 to 3 terms. In the case of West Bengal out of the 208 candidates for the assembly 57 sitting MLAs were changed and 17 candidates who lost were changed making a total of 74. There were 16 candidates who had served 4 terms and 8 candidates who had served more than 4 terms. In the Lok Sabha out of the 31 candidates put up by the Party 9 were new candidates. 5 sitting MPs did not contest again and 5 candidates were those who had served more than 4 terms. The West Bengal secretariat was of the opinion that many of those who had served more than 2-3 terms could not be dispensed with given the toughness of the contest and the short time given to make preparations to change candidates. In Andhra Pradesh, the sitting M.P. who served three terms was changed and a new candidate put up. In Orissa, for the Bhubaneswar seat given the difficult situation and the insistence of the Janata Dal to change our candidate we decided to put up our sitting M.P.

The P.B had suggested that more women candidates should be put up this time. However, only 5 women candidates could be put out of the total of 76. Despite the request of the PB, the Kerala committee could not put up even one women candidate in our list. It is only West Bengal which made an effort in this regard and put up 3 women candidates. As for the rest, there was one from Andhra Pradesh and one from U.P. The struggle against the male dominated outlook must continue. Given the fact that one-third reservation for women is going to be implemented soon for the legislatures and parliament, the Party should seriously address itself to recruiting women in the Party from the mass organisations giving them sufficient scope for education and training so that there can be many women candidates of the Party in the coming days.

Election Commission Curbs

The Election Commission's directives on curbing of election propaganda and expenditure have affected our Party's campaign work according to the reports of many states. While a close check on election expenditure was helpful in curbing the misuse of illegal money and extravagant expenditure, unreasonable curbs on wall writings, propaganda by meetings and mikes and use of posters etc. works to the disadvantage of parties which rely more on political propaganda than on money power to reach the people with their message. Given the experience of these elections we must mount a public campaign on how money power can be curbed in elections without limiting the use of genuine propaganda material and methods to reach the political message to the people.

Party Centre's Work

The election manifesto of the Party was finalised by the PB and released as soon as the elections were announced. The Party Centre published 16,000 copies in English and 40,000 copies in Hindi. The state committees printed the manifesto in various languages.

To assist the political campaign the agit-prop sub-committee decided to bring out a series of pamphlets on various topics to popularise the Party's policy positions. A total of 12 pamphlets covering economic policy, problems of the working class, peasantry, student and youth, women, imperialist pressures and corruption were brought out in English and Hindi from the Centre. Some of these pamphlets were brought out in the various languages by the state committees but some of the states could not utilise them in their own languages in time. A video cassette and some audio cassette of songs were also brought out.

Post-Election Situation

The pre-election situation and the post-election national scene have underlined the important role the Party and the Left have to play in fighting the communal danger, forging the widest secular unity and defending the economic interests of the people and the country. The complicated political situation which emerged after the elections saw the serious bid by the BJP to install and function a government at the centre. The success in uniting all the non-Congress secular forces, in which our party played key role led to the fall of the BJP government

and the formation of the Deve Gowda government. The thwarting of the immediate threat of the BJP capturing power should however not lull us into complacency.

The BJP has emerged as a major force at the national level. Unlike other bourgeois parties it pursues an avowedly reactionary and communal programme. In the coming days, the party will have to vigorously combat the spread of the communal ideology exposing its right wing class character, the reactionary social philosophy of Hindutva and the serious implication of its being in power at the Centre. It also requires consistent efforts to widen the anti-communal mobilisation.

Utilising the presence of the U.F government at the Centre all positive measures to strengthen federalism, secularism, democratic reforms and providing relief to the people must be pursued. At the same time, the Party has to preserve its independent identity, demarcate our position on policies which adversely affect the people, mobilise and launch struggles and movements to defend the interests of the working people.

The advance of the Left and democratic forces can be ensured only if we carry out the major tasks of combating the communal danger and resisting and reversing the imperialist sponsored economic policies. Success in this direction can be ensured only if the Left is strengthened and united.

Following from the election experience, the Party has to address itself to the following tasks immediately.

1. Build up independent movements and struggles of the Party based on the charter of demands of the Left and Democratic Programme set out in the 15th Congress Political resolution. At the same time strengthen the united struggles of the different sections of the working people on their economic demands and against harmful economic policies.

2. Strengthen and widen the anti-communal mobilisation and step up the struggle against the communal-divisive ideology.

3. Initiate immediate steps to draw in the new contacts and activists thrown up during the election campaign into the mass organisations and the Party. Remove the defects seen in the Party organisation during the elections and strengthen the live links with the people. Take steps to develop the Party organisation in the areas where the Party's

election campaign has made an impact and developed new contacts.

4. All state committees should initiate measures to streamline the Party organisation on the basis of the direction given in the last state conference reports and the organisational task set out in the Party Congress. Building the Party organisation has to be accorded priority.

5. The CC should in the next meeting chalk out steps for the rectification campaign called for in the 15th Congress to remove the defects and weaknesses which have crept into the Party organisation.

6. Urgent steps to raise the political-ideological level of the party membership by systematic schooling taking into account the concrete level of consciousness of the Party members. Regular reporting and discussions at appropriate on Party policies and decisions must be arranged.