

**Implications Of BJP Rule:  
The Election Battle Ahead**

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Most of the secular-democratic forces in the country are agreed that the main task in the 14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections is to defeat the BJP and its alliance. This is based on the common and valid assumption that the BJP represents a form of majority communalism which is harmful for the country's unity and its secular and democratic polity. For some of the more perceptive opponents of the BJP, it is also evident that the BJP represents a right wing platform in terms of its economic policies. However, this opposition is not sufficiently grounded on the real implications of the continuation of BJP rule.

It is the inadequate realisation of the potential threat of the BJP continuing to wield State power which is often reflected in the election tactics, campaign issues and superficial bourgeois jousting of the non-Left parties in the opposition. A common method of beating the BJP at its own game is the widespread welcome of middle-level leaders and activists of the BJP when they leave their parent party due to some disgruntlement, mainly of not getting tickets, by the Congress and other bourgeois parties. Not only the Congress, but even parties like the Samajwadi party and the RJD resort to such tactics. In Bihar, it is reported that three of the RJD candidates have a BJP or RSS background.

This approach indicates a serious misreading of the BJP and the gameplan of the RSS. In class terms, the BJP has been the rising force getting increasing support from significant sections of the ruling classes. For such a party which is bent upon legitimizing the Hindutva agenda, it is actually beneficial if there is greater political promiscuity. Politicians from the non-BJP stream joining the BJP gives its respectability and those from the sangh combine joining other parties helps to make its politics less untouchable. One has only to recall the period 1989 to 1996 when the BJP was on the rise; initially, it found it difficult to get allies. In 1996, the 13-day Vajpayee government fell because it could not attract opportunist parties even though it could allure them with office. Step by step this isolation has been broken. L.K. Advani's oft-repeated statement of that period that the BJP does not practice the politics of untouchability must be seen in this context.

So the spectacle of Kalyan Singh joining hands with Mulayam Singh and then returning to the BJP fold in the space of three years; Laloo Prasad Yadav nominating a known VHP man in Muzafarpur and a Babri Masjid demolitionist in Gaya; or the Congress leadership beaming at the arrival of a defector from the BJP are not symptoms of the weakening of the BJP but the facile acceptance of the BJP as another bourgeois party, though fortunate enough to be in power at the Centre.

So in the background of the electoral contest which is hotting up in the country, it is necessary to look at some of the long-term implications of the BJP being in government at the Centre and its concerted bid to win another term in office.

### **Six years of BJP rule**

No other non-Congress combination has ruled for so long as the BJP-led coalition. The Janata Party government in 1977 lasted nearly two and half years; the VP Singh-National Front government was in office for eleven months and the United Front government of 1996-98 for twenty two months.

What is the secret of the longevity of the Vajpayee government which has been in office for six continuous years after winning the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections. An obvious reason is that unlike the previous coalitions, the BJP, as the largest party, far surpassed the strength of its junior partners. The BJP had 182 members as against 110 of all the other parties put together.

But this is not the main reason. The stability achieved by the BJP-led government lies in its class support.

### **Shift In Ruling Classes**

In the 1991 elections, when the BJP made significant gains winning 120 seats and 20 percent of the vote, the CPI(M) in its 14<sup>th</sup> Congress political resolution noted: "These elections saw, for the first time, a section of the big bourgeoisie openly backing and financing the BJP to create an alternative to the Congress(I)".

By the next Lok Sabha elections in 1996, the BJP had won 180 seats emerging as the largest single party for the first time. The 16<sup>th</sup> Congress political resolution analyzing this development in class terms stated: "The erosion of the Congress resulted in a shift in class terms of considerable sections of the big-bourgeois landlords in favour of the BJP. It is this shift towards the reactionary party with a communal platform that has brought about a major change in the situation."

Since then, being in government at the Centre has resulted in consolidation of ruling class support for the BJP. The situation is the reverse from that which prevailed till the eighties. At that time, a majority of the big bourgeoisie and other components of the ruling class were behind the Congress, the BJP had only support from a minority section. Today, the majority is behind the BJP.

### **Regional Parties And the BJP**

While this is the position regarding the big bourgeoisie, the BJP does not command the support of the majority of the bourgeoisie as a whole. An important part of the bourgeoisie in India is the regional bourgeoisie. Though the BJP has made inroads among them, a substantial section is behind the regional parties. It is here that the BJP's tactics of alliance with regional parties has paid off. There is no doubt that the regional bourgeois parties are driven by opportunism. Their political ambitions have been fuelled by the opportunity to participate in Central coalition governments since the days of one-party Congress dominance ended. But just pointing to their political opportunism does not fully answer the question: why is it that secular parties which earlier could not contemplate joining hands with the BJP are now willing to do so whenever it is found expedient?

The answer has to be found in the changing role and outlook of the regional bourgeoisie.

The 17<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Party addressing this phenomenon noted: "There has been a change in the outlook of the regional parties representing the regional bourgeois-landlord classes with the expansion of capitalism. They have changed their attitude to foreign capital and are favourable to the liberalization policies as the regional bourgeoisie sees in them opportunities to advance their interests further." (para 2.70)

It is this changed position of the regional bourgeoisie which has led to the convergence of interests between the BJP, a representative of the big bourgeoisie and the parties representing the regional bourgeoisie. At the political level, in many states, the regional party is the main rival of the Congress and therefore the alliance with the BJP is expedient as it provides additional support against the Congress in electoral terms and secondly it enables its entry into a coalition government at the Centre which can be utilized to consolidate its position in the state. Secularism is a barrier which can be breached when class and political interests converge.

The BJP has also got increasing support from sections of the rural rich. In the nineties, the BJP made headway in winning support from the dominant castes who also comprise the landed interests and the rural rich. The lingayats in the northern part of Karnataka, sections

of the jats in Rajasthan and western Uttar Pradesh, patidars in Gujarat, reddy and kamma in Andhra Pradesh and Marathas in Maharashtra. It is this acceptance by the rural rich which has provided the spread of the BJP's political and electoral influence. In garnering support from these sections, the alliance with regional parties in certain states has been helpful. According to a study done based on the data of exit polls in 1999, BJP and its allies secured the support of 52 per cent of the dominant Hindu peasant castes. The BJP has been successful in getting the support of some important OBC landed interests too. It is these rural classes which have been supporting the regional parties too.

The temporary gains made by the regional parties by allying with the BJP have proved costly for them in the long run. In Karnataka, the JD(U) has been disintegrating and its base is in the process of appropriation by the BJP. In Assam, the Asom Gana Parishad has not been able to prevent the erosion of its base towards the BJP even though it made an opportunistic alliance with it during the last assembly elections. In Orissa, the BJP has gained at the expense of the BJD with the RSS systematically penetrating the social base which has been the mainstay of the BJD and the erstwhile Janata Dal. Both in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar there are indications that in the current elections the TDP and the JD(U)-Samata Party will be at the losing end despite their alliance with the BJP.

The weakened position of the regional parties is reflected in the way the NDA has gone into these elections. The NDA manifesto includes the Ayodhya issue unlike in 1999. Further, there is a commitment to bring a central legislation for the protection of the cow. The BJP has succeeded in getting a mention of autonomy for the Ladakh and Jammu regions without any reference to Article 370. The Prime Minister himself has openly spoken about the difficulties of running a twenty-two party coalition and expressed his preference for a single party government, during the campaign.

Though the BJP may be served well in keeping the truncated NDA together in these elections, the break-up of this entente with regional parties cannot be ruled out. It will be in the interest of the left and democratic forces to adopt an approach and suitable tactics which can facilitate this detachment. For this, it will be necessary to highlight the following pertinent features:

- a. Most of the regional parties have their rural support base among the peasantry. They have been badly hit by the agrarian policies of the BJP-led central government. Identifying with the BJP and these policies would steadily erode the mass base of these parties.
- b. Similarly, the implementation of the neo-liberal policies of privatisation of public services is imposing new burdens on the

people and alienating the mass support of these parties. The state governments which the regional parties are primarily interested in, become the target of mass discontent because of these policies. It is in their interests therefore to be part of an alternative economic platform which provides the state government with sufficient resources to look after those areas such as agriculture, education, health which are state subjects.

- c. It is more natural for most of the regional parties to be part of a third alternative which preserves the secular platform, than succumbing to the hegemony of a Hindutva party representing the big bourgeoisie. Cohabitation with such a party will adversely affect their own political influence and result in the erosion of their social base. The BJP seeks to appropriate the same base which the regional parties possess.

While working for such a detachment of the regional parties from the BJP and the forging of an alternative combination, the aspirations of the regional bourgeoisie which has benefited from the dismantling of the old centralised economic regime which favoured the big business houses must be taken into account.

Whatever the results of these Lok Sabha elections, the attitude to the regional parties will occupy a crucial position in the coming days. As the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress Political Resolution pointed out, the CPI(M) will adopt a differentiated approach to the regional parties. It will firmly oppose those who opportunistically joined hands with the BJP. As for those who demarcate from the BJP, "The Party will join united struggles on political and mass issues and enter into electoral understanding from time to time with them."

## **Imperialism**

The BJP is a natural ally of imperialism. This is derived from the right reactionary and communal character of the RSS. The Hindutva ideologues have always wanted India to emulate the state of Israel with its close ties with the USA. V.D. Savarkar, the father of Hindutva, had as early as 1956 held up Israel as an example in the manner it militarised itself and inflicted defeats on the Arabs. In today's changed world situation, the BJP has sought to combine its traditional anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim stance with a servile attitude to the United States of America. In return, the support US imperialism extends to the BJP regime is based on two factors. Firstly, the US understood as soon as the Pokhran blast took place in May 1998 that the BJP is willing to subordinate India to America's global strategy in exchange for a *de facto* recognition of its nuclear weapon status. Secondly, the zeal displayed by the BJP for pushing through neo-liberal policies is reassuring for America and the

imperialist countries which overcomes any reservations that may exist about its majoritarian communalism.

The stabilization of a regime headed by the BJP with its desire to become a “great power” with US patronage would create a extremely hostile environment for the left and democratic forces in India. Given the fact that the main rival opposition party, the Congress, does not show any awareness of the dangers of this imperialist linkage, the return of the BJP to power would lead to an acceleration of the pace of American influence over the affairs of the country.

### **BJP's Attitude to Minorities**

The return of the BJP and the consolidation of its hold over the Central government will bring about other changes which will seriously affect the democratic and secular features of our society. Already some change in the BJP-minorities equation can be discerned. The BJP is striving to persuade the Muslims to come to terms with the reality of BJP rule. Amongst the Muslims, a section is now veering around to some sort of accommodation with the BJP. Though a small section, it is a portent of things to come. One motivation is simply the search for the crumbs of office and the opportunist quest for minor concessions which is seen in persons like Arif Mohd. Khan joining the BJP, or, the Delhi Jama Masjid' Imam's new-found softness for the BJP. The other is a resigned acceptance of living under conditions of majority dominance - what the RSS chief Sudarshan graphically described as living on the goodwill of the majority.

The BJP senses the time has come to push on with its majoritarian agenda while offering a subjugated peace to the Muslims. Some months ago Advani stated in an interview that the Muslims are coming around to the view that the Ram temple issue must be settled. For this, he cited the international environment wherein Muslims are feeling besieged. Domestically, after Gujarat, the BJP believes winning another term in office would create favourable conditions to resume the charade of negotiations which were attempted during its last stint through the good offices of the Kanchi Shankaracharya, a staunch supporter of the VHP. The BJP expects a cowed minority to accept some one-sided compromise which will allow the temple to be built at the Babri Masjid site. The BJP manifesto promises to look after the welfare of the Muslims, their educational and economic status and promote Urdu. All this is possible, if the Muslim minority recognizes that Hindutva is a way of life which they must come to terms with.

A few years in government has convinced the BJP that it can co-opt institutions meant to protect minority interests rather than dismantle them. The BJP was vehemently opposed to the setting up of a Minorities Commission when it was set-up in 1993. It no longer

does so. Being in office, it has reconstituted the Commission which now acts more as a defender of the government rather than as an independent body.

Gujarat in 2002 was a turning point. It was meant to be a salutary lesson for the Muslims. Godhra and the terrorist label will be utilised ruthlessly to put down the community – the alternative is to accept the BJP as patron and protector. What is unspoken is that the RSS can unleash minority-baiting and violence whenever required to create a communal polarization for political purposes. India-Pakistan relations is also projected from this standpoint. For the Muslims, it is underlined that good relations with Pakistan is possible only if there is a Hindutva hardline regime in power in India. Obversely, the Muslims in India are hostage to any deterioration in relations with Pakistan.

The targeting of Muslims and Christians as threats to the nation and Hinduism will be continued by the RSS even if the BJP desists from doing so during the election period. The work amongst the tribal people by the RSS and its outfits in the central and eastern belts has continued full swing with no let-up in attack on Christian tribals and the aggressive Hinduisation of the tribal youth. The Jhabua attacks on Christians after the BJP formed the government in Madhya Pradesh indicates the long-term nature of this strategy.

### **Threat to democracy**

It will not be the minorities alone who will find their position as citizens threatened. The unfolding of the neo-liberal policies and the pressure of international finance capital is bound to lead to a heightened threat for democracy and democratic rights in general. The attack on working class rights will be compounded by the curtailment of democratic rights. The right to demonstrate, the right to collective protests, the right to strike are to be circumscribed by judicial and administrative fiat. The BJP will find partners in this venture from amongst its other bourgeois allies including the corporate sector.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections are important not just from the class standpoint, it has wider implications for the bourgeois democratic State and its secular character. A victory for the BJP coalition would mean another step towards a creeping authoritarianism under a Hindutva regime. Such a regime would have the support of imperialism. It would escalate the enforcement of a neo-liberal regime with all its attendant social and political consequences.

A defeat for the BJP would provide a breathing space to halt the precipitate slide down this path. An alternative government would not reverse the basic economic policies but will be under pressure to desist from its most harmful aspects. It will provide an opportunity to check and reverse the anti-secular penetration of the

state apparatus and other institutions. It will provide the space for the Left and democratic forces to mobilise the working people and the democratic forces to fight for alternative policies.

### **Congress: No Viable Alternative**

It is well established that the Congress party has been in a state of decline for nearly two decades. Though the Party still has the largest electoral base in the country, its support has been steadily decreasing. In the 1980s the Congress averaged 40 per cent of the vote in the Lok Sabha elections which has come down to 26 per cent and 28 per cent in the last two Lok Sabha polls in 1998 and 1999. This is a reflection of the shrinkage of its influence over different sections of society. Unlike the BJP, the Congress party has been unable to come to terms with allying with other political parties including the regional parties. It is only on the eve of the recent elections that the Congress changed this approach.

Accompanying the decline has been a process of ideological corrosion which was noted by the CPI(M) in its 14<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1992. Faced with the resurgence of the communal forces and the onslaught on its ideological positions, the Congress party retreated and sought to compromise with such forces. That trend which reached its height at the time of the ram temple movement culminating in the demolition of the Babri Masjid, still lingers on. It was seen in the way the Congress leader and Chief Minister Digvijay Singh dealt with the BJP-RSS campaign in Madhya Pradesh before the assembly elections and currently in Gujarat where the Congress cannot muster courage to confront the BJP on the issues thrown up by the horrific communal pogroms of 2002.

More problematic for the Congress is its inability to project an alternative set of policies in the economic sphere. The economic prescriptions set out in the Congress manifesto appear to be a pale version of the BJP's economic policies. To ignore the disastrous effects of the WTO regime on agriculture and industry, to talk of "selective privatisation" of the public sector and not give a categorical assurance that profitable public sector units will not be sold off like the Congress leaders have been assuring in parliament and outside; to talk of competition in the financial sector as a euphuism for promoting the private sector - all these have made the Congress platform indistinct from that of the BJP.

The CPI(M) has already pointed out in its election manifesto the experience of the Congress-run state governments which are in effect pursuing the economic agenda of the Central government. This approach stems from the class character of the Congress.

The Congress will be at a crossroads after the 14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections. It will be faced with the choice of adopting a social



democratic platform within the limitations of its class character, or continue the quest to present itself as a BJP clone minus the communal outlook. In the first case, the Congress may succeed in reviving itself and mobilising the people who have deserted it. If it continues with the latter, it will slide down further.

### **The Election Tactics of the Party**

The failure to mount an effective attack on the Vajpayee government's economic policies and to project an alternative set of policies by the Congress works to the advantage of the ruling coalition. This coupled with the ideological ambivalence in countering the BJP-RSS combine's multi-layered campaign had to be taken into account while working out the election tactics. At the same time in the electoral contest in many areas the fight will be between the BJP and the Congress. It will be important in determining the outcome, how far the Congress is able to mobilise the people against the BJP and its allies. It is equally important to ensure that the anti-BJP vote is not unnecessarily divided.

The CPI(M) had to work out its electoral tactics taking into account all these factors. The defeat of the BJP and its alliance should be the main task for the Left and democratic forces. The danger posed by the BJP in power of communalising the State apparatus and Indian society must be checked. Secondly, the people have to be mobilised against the harmful economic policies which have played havoc with their lives. The BJP's pro-American policies must be exposed. The opportunistic nature of the NDA alliance should be highlighted.

The Central Committee noted that this must be done while setting out the alternative policies that the CPI(M) and the Left represents. This will require an independent campaign of the Party alongside the joint platform and the united campaign that we may conduct. The electoral struggle has to be conducted in a situation where there is no third alternative at the national level. In each state the Party will have to adopt tactics to rally the widest secular and democratic forces to defeat the BJP and its allies. While doing so the Party cannot have an alliance or front with the Congress. In the independent campaign the Party will expose the harmful economic policies of the Congress. One of the key tasks in these elections would be to mobilise people on our political platform and increase the strength of the CPI(M) and the Left.

Given the complexity and the diverse situation in the states, the Party has worked out tactics in each state to help target the BJP and its allies and forge an understanding with the non-Congress secular parties. Where the main polarization is between the Congress and the BJP, the Party is contesting a limited number of seats and conducting a general campaign calling for the defeat of the BJP

alliance. The effort is to see that the division of the anti-BJP votes is minimised to the extent possible.

It is with these election tactics that the CPI(M) is fighting the Lok Sabha elections. The three fold task set forth of defeating the BJP and its allies, formation of a secular government at the Centre and increasing the strength of the CPI(M) and the Left is the basis of the political campaign. The enhanced strength of the CPI(M) and the Left in the Lok Sabha will facilitate the advance of the struggle against the communal forces, the neo-liberal policies and the growing influence of imperialism.

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