

After the elections

Political crisis in India intensified

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Political horse-trading has begun between various bourgeois parties, including the Stalinist parties—the Communist Party of India [CPI] and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)]—as the general election results provided no single party or coalition with a clear majority.

The Bharathiya Janata Party [BJP] heads up the front of parties that gained the largest number of parliamentary seats, but its coalition managed to poll only 251 seats out of the declared 534 seats in the 543-seat parliament. The BJP front includes fascistic parties such as Shiva Sena and the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh [RSS]. The RSS was instrumental in murdering Mohandas Gandhi in 1948 in the aftermath of the independence settlement that divided the subcontinent into India and Pakistan along religious lines. The BJP is also allied with other capitalist sections that broke away from the Congress Party, mainly on the basis of regional, communal and caste interests.

The United Front-Left Front [UF-LF], which ruled the country for 18 months after the defeat of the Congress Party government in 1996, was reduced to 96 seats. Its main constituent party, Janata Dal, headed by the caretaker prime minister, Indra Kumar Gujral, won only six seats. It had held 46 seats in the previous coalition government, which included the Stalinist parties.

The Congress Party slightly increased its strength in parliament. This is attributed to the “Sonia Gandhi factor.” The Italian-born wife of the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was brought forward after behind-the-scenes political maneuvers to head up the election campaign of Congress. But she and her party received a painful slap from the voters in Amethi, considered to be a traditional pocket borough of the Gandhi family, where Sonia Gandhi had launched her election campaign tour. In that constituency the BJP defeated the Congress candidate by a huge majority.

Following its election setback, the UF-LF has unashamedly promised to support the Congress Party in

its bid to form the next government. Congress’ withdrawal of support for the UF-LF coalition had toppled the Gujral regime. The initiative in the move to form another bourgeois coalition, this one to be headed by Congress, was taken by CPI(M) leader Harikrishan Singh Surjeet.

He said that “though the CPI(M) did not agree with the Congress’ economic policies, it did not regard it as a communal party, despite its compromise with communal forces.” This is to deny that the communal policies of the bourgeoisie, aimed at dividing the working class and inciting fratricidal struggles, are rooted in an economic strategy directed against the working class and the impoverished masses.

The Stalinists want to overlook the fact that the Congress Party withdrew its support from the UF-LF government when the latter failed to put down a 2.5-million-strong strike by government workers last September. A new coalition between Congress and the UF-LF would be firmly based on the pro-imperialist and anti-working class agenda of the Congress Party, which has become increasingly open under Narasimha Rao.

Some 45 percent of the electorate failed to vote in the election, an increase of nearly 3 percent since the last general election in 1996. Only 45 percent cast ballots in the administrative center and capital of Delhi. The number of those abstaining increased in almost all regions. The figures mean that over 160 million voters declined to participate. This expresses growing disillusionment in the parliamentary system of rule which was imposed on India 50 years ago by British imperialism and the national bourgeoisie.

The main capitalist daily newspaper, the *Hindu*, said in a pre-election comment: “If the overall mood of the electorate during the run-up to the election is one of disinterest, first-time voters seem to be totally nonchalant and disenchanted even before they have cast their vote.

“Yet to grasp the dynamics of politics and assimilate its

nuances, their responses range from anger to cynicism. None of them seem to be interested in even verifying the electoral list to find out whether their names are in print in the basic document.

“While most urban youths are inclined to dismiss the processions and public meetings...the perception of the rural youth seems to be that they have no stake whatsoever in this event.”

The apathy of youth in general and the rural youth in particular towards the system of bourgeois parliamentary rule is politically noteworthy. They are the new generation which faces no future under conditions of a deepening crisis in the global capitalist system of production. Their own life experiences are driving them to seek an alternative to the existing economic and social order, one that can satisfy their basic needs. In fact, their aspirations can be fulfilled only by the working class taking power and reorganizing the production and distribution of goods from the standpoint of achieving social equality.

The extraordinary level of abstention in the election is indicative of a general alienation among the masses and, in its own way, constitutes an indictment of 50 years of capitalist rule in India. Various indices of the social conditions which underlie the political disenchantment provide a stark and damning balance sheet of this half-century:

- * 36 percent of the country's 960 million people live below the poverty line.

- * 33 million children do not attend school.

- * 66 percent of females and 36 percent of males cannot read.

- * On average, a suicide takes place somewhere in India every six minutes.

Neither the capitalist parties, nor the Stalinists, nor the various petty-bourgeois “left” groups that orbit around the Stalinists, address the intolerable social conditions facing the masses, let alone propose a program to eradicate these conditions. They are all fully committed to the implementation of the dictates of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which can only have the effect of aggravating the social crisis and increasing the chasm between the rich and the vast majority of the people.

Reuters on March 5 quoted one Indian bourgeois political scientist who noted with regret that Sonia Gandhi had failed to address any of the social questions that concern ordinary working people: “Sonia had spoken little of issues that would have struck a chord with

electors, such as availability of drinking water, violence against women, youth unemployment, housing and infrastructure.”

But this true observation holds for all of the parties that contested the elections. None had a policy to offer the masses a way out of their social misery.

Indeed, the election results show that the BJP's gains are far more a reflection of frustration among petty-bourgeois layers with the other bourgeois parties and the Stalinists, than a demonstration of support for the politics and actions of the BJP itself. The BJP lost heavily in the two key states where it had been elected and held power over the past several years—Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

The main responsibility for blocking an alternative path for the working class, the oppressed masses and the urban and rural youth rests with the Stalinist parties of India—the CPI, the CPI(M) and the Maoist groups, beginning with the Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist [CPI(ML)]. Of the latter there are two categories, those that participate in the opportunist parliamentary maneuvers of the main Stalinist parties, and those that indulge in terrorist acts, which only serve to disorient the masses and provide new pretexts for the state to strengthen its repressive apparatus.

The basic line of the Stalinists to justify their program of class compromise—that the Hindu fundamentalists of the BJP and their allies in the fascist RSS and Shiva Sena can be stopped from coming to power by means of parliamentary amalgamations with bourgeois parties—stands exposed as politically bankrupt. Every petty-bourgeois “left” group that peddled that line, including the Mandelite renegades from Trotskyism, has only paved the way for the electoral gains of the BJP.

Only the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sympathizing party, the Socialist Labour League of India, have provided the perspective for the working class, on the basis of an international socialist program, to rally the oppressed masses and defeat the growth of extreme right-wing forces. This program is founded on the struggle for a workers' and peasants' government in India, as part of a socialist federation of the Indian subcontinent.



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