

Upstart AAP staggers BJP and Congress in Delhi Assembly election

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Formed less than three years ago, the Aam Aadmi (Common Man's) Party has scored a stunning upset in the Delhi assembly elections, delivering a significant blow to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his nine month-old Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government.

The AAP has captured 67 of the 70 assembly seats in India's National Capital Territory, which, with more than 20 million inhabitants, is also India's largest urban agglomeration. The Hindu supremacist BJP, which had swept Delhi in last May's national election and fully expected to top the polls in the just concluded assembly election, won the remaining three seats—28 less than it had in the 2013 Delhi election.

The Congress Party, which had ruled Delhi for 15 years from 1998 through 2013, was entirely shut out. This is only the latest in a series of electoral debacles stretching back to the last year's national elections, when the Congress, India's traditional governing party, not only fell from power, but failed to even win the fifty seats required to be recognized as the Official Opposition.

The AAP received 54.3 percent of the vote, a 25 percentage point increase from its score in the 2013 Delhi elections, while the BJP won 32.2 percent and the Congress Party just 9.7 percent.

Arvind Kejriwal, a former government tax collector, who first came to prominence as one of the principal leaders of a middle-class "anti-corruption" movement, led the AAP campaign and is expected to be sworn in as Delhi's Chief Minister at a ceremony on February 14.

The BJP expended no small effort to capture power in Delhi, with Modi himself taking to the campaign trail and the BJP and its Hindu supremacist allies mobilizing more than a hundred thousand volunteers. While

India's ruling party is now trying to downplay the significance of the Delhi elections, they have put the lie to the image the BJP and corporate-media have sought to craft of an unstoppable Modi "wave."

The AAP is a bourgeois party. It was formed by a section of the leaders of the 2011 anti-corruption movement, which tapped into middle class anger over increasing social inequality, rising prices and deteriorating job prospects for graduates. While it railed against the corruption of the Congress Party-led national and Delhi governments, the anti-corruption movement ignored big business's role in determining and dictating government policy and the extent to which India's corporate elite has gorged on the fire-sale and even outright gifting of government assets under BJP and Congress governments alike.

Significantly many of Kejriwal's allies in the anti-corruption campaign subsequently threw their support behind the BJP. These included former policewoman Kiran Bedi, whom Modi personally selected and imposed on a recalcitrant Delhi BJP-state unit as the party's Chief Ministerial candidate in the 2015 assembly elections.

After the AAP scored a breakthrough in the 2013 Delhi election and briefly formed a minority government, Kejriwal went out of his way to pledge his support for big business, declaring that the AAP is not opposed to capitalism, only "crony capitalism." He also emphasized that many of his relatives are businessmen and that the change the AAP's want to bring about will be "incomplete without participation of the business class."

Notwithstanding all of this, the AAP clearly was perceived by wide sections of the population as an "anti-establishment" party.

Emphasizing a commitment to improve public

services, epitomized by its call for “bijli, paani and sadak” (power, water and roads), the AAP was able to win the votes of broad sections of workers, street vendors, and middle class people.

The AAP’s ability to pass itself off as a “pro-people” party is bound up with the criminal role of India’s Stalinist parties. Over the past two decades, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the older, smaller Communist Party of India (CPI) have supported the bourgeoisie’s neo-liberal agenda, sustaining in office a series of right-wing Indian governments, most of them Congress-led. Conceding it has little influence in India’s largest city, the CPM called for an AAP vote in the Feb. 7 Delhi election.

Another factor that contributed to the AAP victory was the support it received from Delhi’s large Muslim minority, and other sections of the population angered by the aggressive communalism of Modi and his BJP.

With the tacit and at times explicit support of Modi’s government, the Hindu right has gone on the offensive since the BJP won national office, mounting a series of provocations aimed at asserting Hindu superiority and cowing India’s religious minorities.

In the run-up to the Delhi vote there were communal altercations in many Delhi neighbourhoods, including Trilokpuri, Bawana, Nangloi, Nand Nagiri and Okhla, targeting Muslims and Dalits (the former untouchables) in what appears to have been a deliberate attempt upon the part of the Hindu right to whip up communal strife so as to polarize the electorate. There has also been a series of attacks on Christian churches, including vandalism and arson.

The rise to power of the AAP is an indication of the mass disaffection of the population with India’s main bourgeois parties, the BJP and Congress. Under conditions where the working class has been held in check by the Stalinists, the AAP was able to tap into the deep popular anxiety and anger over acute economic insecurity and the rabid communalism of the BJP government and its Sangh Parivar (Hindu nationalist) allies.

Invariably the AAP will cruelly disappoint the hopes placed in it by working people and come into open conflict with the working class. Significantly, the AAP did not repeat many of the populist promises it made in the 2013 Delhi election campaign, such as halving electricity bills for consumers using less than 400 Kwh

and providing 20,000 liters of free water per month to all households. Instead, it issued a “70-point Action Plan” full of vague promises.



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