

India on the Eve of Elections

S. A. DANGE

Chairman, Communist Party of India

CPYRGHT

I

INDIA'S ruling class politicians are very fond of telling the world that India is the largest democracy in the world. They will not agree to qualify it and say that it is the largest bourgeois democracy.

And due to realism or perhaps scorn, they will also not call it socialist democracy, despite the fact that for the last fifteen years they have been claiming to build "socialism" in India!

No, it is just democracy—and the largest one. They advertise this particularly when in America.

India touched the figure of 500 million population last year.

Thus, it is the second largest population in the world, China's being the first.

The most outstanding fact that makes it a democracy is that India is governed by a Parliament, which is elected every five years on the basis of adult franchise. Since independence came in 1947 and the Constitution of the Republic of the Indian Union was adopted on January 26, 1950, we have had three general elections—first, in 1952, second in 1957 and third in 1962. And the fourth is coming in February 1967.

We are a democracy in this sense. Moreover, the Constitution guarantees to every citizen not only to vote and elect a Parliament and Government. It also guarantees certain fundamental democratic rights and lays down directive principles to guide State policy. The rights and principles by themselves are no doubt good, if properly implemented. For example, it was because these rights came to be established in 1950 that the Communist Party, trade union and other organisations which had been declared illegal and suppressed in 1948 were legalised and thousands of our people were released from prison.

But within the framework of this very Constitution and the Fundamental Rights, a new law called the Preventive Detention Act was passed in 1952 under which once again many political workers continued to be imprisoned.

And since 1962 and the India-China conflict, the country has been under a state of emergency, by which, though the Parliament sits and deliberates as before, all the Fundamental Rights, which were claimed to be the basic ingredients of this largest democracy, have been suspended, without any remedy before the Supreme Court of the land.

In view of this state of emergency and the Defence of India Rules, the necessity for which vanished long ago, thousands have been sent to jail for the mere expression of political opinions or for conducting strikes or other struggles for defence of people's rights and living.

In short, we have a Parliament and we have elections to the Parliament despite the state of emergency. You may say that elections are free, as far as they can be in a bourgeois democracy, where the power of the purse, the press and the policy is in the hands of the ruling bourgeoisie and its landlord allies. You may form any political party and nominate candidates. And if your candidate gets the highest vote as against his other rivals, he is declared elected. The vote is cast by the name of each candidate and his symbol which is given to him for identification by illiterate voters. The vote is not for the Party as is the case in some countries. Nor is there proportional representation in the voting system.

Out of a population of 500 million people, 240 million are registered voters in this year. In the 1962 elections they numbered 216 million. Thus one can see that the number of registered voters in India is 50 million more than the total population of America, and 10 million more than the population of the USSR. The vastness of this number itself would show how difficult it is for a party not in power and without the vast resources of the bourgeoisie to mobilise the people for the vote.

We have direct elections to the Parliament of the whole country. But the country is divided into 17 States roughly on a linguistic and

historical basis. Then there are 9 territorial areas under the Union Government.

The 17 State Assemblies also are elected on the same day by the same voter in the same booth but with a separate ballot box. The following table shows the number of voters, seats and booths in the coming elections.

	1967	1962
Registered voters (million)	240	216
Parliament—seats	521	497
State Assemblies—seats	3,563	3,405
Polling Stations—number	270,000	250,000

Each booth serves 1,000 voters and it would require at least five cadres for a party to man one booth. Thus if a party were to contest all the seats, it would have to put into the field on the polling day at least one million organisers, which is beyond the capacity of any democratic opposition party in the present conditions.

In the existing Parliament (as of January 20, 1965) there are 504 members. The ruling Congress Party holds 365 seats and all the opposition parties and individuals make up the rest—133 (in which three were vacant). The ruling party has an overwhelming majority over all the opposition parties together.

In this opposition total, the Communist Party of India (before the split) held 30 seats out of 133. Even then we were given the first role in the opposition as no other single party by itself had as many seats as ours.

After the split in the Party, we retained 18 members of Parliament, and they numbered 12. The three other parties of importance are the Sangukta Socialist Party with 16 Members of Parliament, Jan Sangh with 13 members and Swatantra Party with 16.

There are 13 other parties with about 30 MPs but since they did not get 5 per cent of the votes cast, they are not acknowledged as all-India parties for the purposes of listing in the Parliament. Such parties worth noting are, for example, the Republican Party, the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Moslem League, the Hindu Mahasabha. Some parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) are limited to certain states and areas only, though they have a sizeable following. The next election battles are going to be fought round the platforms of these parties and their fronts or combinations, on an all-India and local scales.

The Congress Party remains the most formidable force in power. It is being opposed mainly by two forces—one representing the progressive democratic masses of the toiling people drawn from the working class, the peasantry, the middle classes, as also sections of the national bourgeoisie opposed to monopoly capital; and the other representing Right reaction. There are intermediary groups who hover between the two on the basis of group interests and not purely on programmes and policies.

The elections this time will show some new features and new combinations and upsets in almost all parties, including the ruling Congress Party and the opposition parties of the democratic Left and the reactionary Right.

II

The Indian electoral system is based on the majority vote and not on proportional representation. The majority-vote system has had the peculiar result that the Congress Party in India has been in power without ever getting the majority of the votes of the total poll in all the three elections. Of the total votes cast in the three elections, the Congress Party got

45.02 per cent votes in 1951-52

47.78 per cent votes in 1957

45.06 per cent votes in 1962.

And yet with such a minority of the popular vote, the Congress Party secured the overwhelming majority of the seats, both in the Parliament and in the States. Only once in Kerala, the Congress Party was defeated by the Communist Party which got three more