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The Revolt in the South

POLITICS in the placid south is getting increasingly ruffled. With the results for all but a handful of seats remaining to be announced for Madras State Assembly, the chances of the Congress Party forming a stable Ministry appear to be rather remote. In an Assembly of 375, Congress has secured only 151 seats out of 370 seats the results for which have been announced at the time of writing. The Congress is not only short of about 25 votes in the new Assembly to secure even a bare majority, the legislative wing of the Congress Party in Madras has been rendered leaderless as a result of the defeat of the six Congress ministers headed by the Chief Minister, Shri P. S. Kumaraswamy Raja, who will now have to resign and hand over charge to a care-taker ministry.

The attention of the Congress High Command is now focussed on the more important question of whether to form a Congress Ministry by wooing some independents of the right into the Congress fold or to leave the initiative to the opposition led by the United Front of the Left. Political observers do not, however, doubt the ability of the Congress, though badly mauled, to muster enough votes to form a majority in the State Assembly. Congress has always been a loose conglomeration of heterogeneous elements that present a facade of unity behind which it can comfortably shelter many conflicting interests. The organisation may be in a state of flux but it endures. It is always possible to draw some of the independents into an alliance with the Congress, depending on the plums that the party can offer. The Congress in Madras may therefore be able to get together a working majority with a rightist coalition. But how long this coalition will be able to hold together is anybody's guess. Considering the inherent organisational looseness of the Congress, several meteor may fly off any day from the main planet as a result of the gravitational pulls of the other bodies. So, the problem before the Madras Congress is not only to make friends with like-minded legislators, but also to make sure that waverers will not desert at an inconvenient moment.

Viewed from a wider angle, it all depends on the future policy of the Working Committee. If, for instance, Pandit Nehru takes a definite, and favourable stand on the question of forming linguistic provinces! surely, his party in Madras will find new supporters both inside and outside the legislature. That alone, would perhaps be enough to ensure ministerial stability, but it is highly doubtful if the Congress would risk taking an unequivocal stand on this issue because it would open a Pandora's box elsewhere. Indeed it was because of the equivocal stand on this issue, that the Congress lost quite a good number of seats in the Telgu and Kannada speaking areas in the State.

Leftist opposition is equally in an amorphous state. All in all the combined opposition in Madras Assembly has a total strength of around 210 as against the 151 seats secured by the Congress Party. But this