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Verdict of the People

K'ARL MARX, It has been remarked, was a good economist, but a bad politician. He has been proved a false prophet. Capitalism has not collapsed because Marx's second postulate of increasing misery of the labour class has proved wrong. Marx failed to anticipate the advent of Democracy. This political device has disproved Marx by falsifying his assumptions. There is an element of truth in this assessment of Marx. Democracy has had a tendency to stimulate consumption. Here, the crucial issue whether Democracy can ensure adequate accumulation of capital is not directly under reference. Despite the favourable American experience, theoreticians of Democratic Socialism have their doubts. But even pundits concede that Democracy has been a major influence behind the survival of Capitalism.

To accept this interpretation, is not necessarily to admit the sovereignty of politics over economics. To the extent that both have a sociological basis, each acts and reacts on the other. Even so, in a materialistic Society, it is permissible to argue the case for economic sovereignty. It is irrelevant to discuss here whether Society in India is materialistic in that sense. But it is clear beyond the shadow of any doubt that economic issues have been the prime underlying factors in free India's second general elections. Certainly, it is true that the Congress is being voted to power because the people have no faith in alternative leadership. This remains a challenge to the Opposition. But it would be dishonest not to concede that the Congress can claim a more positive, economic interpretation of election results announced so far.

By all current indications, the Congress seems to be bettering its performance in the first general elections. It is winning more seats in Parliament and in many State assemblies. It is, and this is far more significant, polling more votes. Even this time, the Congress will be winning the elections on a minority vote. But it is futile to emphasise the significance of this aspect of the election verdict. In a vast country, with a multiplicity of parties contesting the elections, the winning party must necessarily become the ruling party on a minority vote. Far more significant is the growing evidence that, this time, the Congress is not winning on the split vote. In many States, the parties of the Left entered into an electoral alliance against the Congress. In the majority of crucial contests, there have been straight fights. And the Congress has won the majority of such seats.

An exhaustive analysis of election results must necessarily await a detailed tabulation of voting throughout the country. But certain inferences can be drawn. There is evidence that the Congress has improved its position in rural areas. This cannot be explained away mainly by casting a reflection on the level of political consciousness of rural India. It is no less a refraction of the Second Plan's bias to village and small-scale industries, of Community Projects and National Extension Service, of abolition of landlordism, of repeated avowals of the Congress sympathy and concern for the uplift of the farmer and the village community. But in urban and semi-urban areas, too, the Congress has scored overwhelming successes. With the exception of the City of Calcutta where the Congress has won so far less seats than the combined Left, or of Bombay and Ahmedabad, where the electorate has clearly voted against the

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bilingual State, it seems to be more than holding its ground in other metropolitan towns.

No positive trend against the Congress is traceable yet on the classification of voting on a rural-urban basis. But there is growing evidence of the losing hold of the Congress on workers. It would, perhaps, be more accurate to put it the other way about. Evidence accumulates that the people reject INTUC. Shri Khandubhai Desai's defeat is mainly a vindication of the justness and popularity of the demand for linguistic States. But it should not be ignored or minimised that Shri Indulal Yajnik, the successful rival candidate, is also a formidable trade union leader. Many prominent INTUC men and officials have lost the elections. It is, therefore, a reasonable deduction that the people are not satisfied with the policy of the Labour-wing of the Congress.

Election results in Bombay demonstrate convincingly the deep-rooted and broad-based demand for linguistic States. Apart from Kerala and Orissa, where the Congress defeat stems from different political influences, in Bombay, the Opposition is likely to emerge, on current indications, stronger numerically than in any other State. It would be undemocratic of the Congress to ignore the implications of election victories of candidates put forward by the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti and the Maha Gujarat Parishad. Reports from New Delhi indicate that Pandit Nehru still insists on bracketing the linguistic movement with communal organisations as undesirable political elements. In admonishing communal elements, Pandit Nehru is flogging the skeleton of a non-existent ass. At the time of this writing, the Jan Sangh, the only active communal body, has won only one parliamentary seat, and not even 45 among the 3,177 seats in Vidhan Sabhas.

It would be undemocratic of the Congress to deprive CPI of its legitimate right to form a government in Kerala. Orissa is on the other extreme. It would be wrong to interpret Orissa's verdict as another victory for advocates of linguistic States. Maharaja of Patna's Ganatantra Parishad is a peculiar amalgam of feudalism and of an odd political phenomenon that is represented by the vast number of seats contested by, as well as the

success of, Independents. If Kerala and Orissa are challenges to the Congress from Extreme Left and Extreme Right, Madras and Punjab are clear warnings against undue reliance on questionable party politics.

Despite Punjab and Madras, in spite of the retreat from Kerala, notwithstanding the ignominious rebuff in Orissa, the overall Congress victory in the second general elections is an emphatic vindication of the Second Plan. It is abundantly evident that the people endorse the philosophy behind the Second Plan. It Congress won the first general election by its promise of a Plan, it is winning the second because the people endorse the Congress decision of a bolder Second Plan. This is the positive, economic, interpretation of the people's verdict. But it poses a political problem which may assume significance. If the Second Plan succeeds, if the third and successive five-year plans are based on the underlying principles of the second, the Congress may continue to be the party in power for a decade more. This raises the problem of monopoly of political power. In vot-

ing the Congress back to power, the people are hoping that it will have the wisdom and statesmanship to ensure parliamentary democracy. It is, indeed, a plausible interpretation of the election verdict that the people have faith that the Congress alone can implement economic planning on a democratic basis. Because no solid Opposition has emerged out of the elections, it would be dishonest of the Congress to ignore this aspect of the people's verdict. There are sophisticated arguments behind the theory of a national, one-party government in under-developed countries. But these are also arguments which can be exploited by aspiring fascists or by political elements with totalitarian leanings. Therefore, the Congress has both a moral and a political responsibility to ensure active implementation of the elaborate system of checks and balances which is an inevitable concomitant of a virile parliamentary democracy. Similarly, in the absence of any strong Opposition, the Judiciary and the Press have a joint duty to function as watchdogs of Democracy.

Not Less Investment!

THE budget presented by the Finance Minister contains no fresh tax proposals. Its main purpose was to place before Parliament an account of the finances of the Central Government for the current year and to obtain from the House a vote on account to meet Government's expenditure until the new Parliament considers the budget again. But except that the Finance Bill merely continues for the next financial year, that is until the tax proposals are presented in May, the budget has been presented in full. The programme of expenditure for the next financial year fully maintains the tempo of development and the expenditure next year in the revenue budget is estimated at Rs 663 crores, compared to Rs 534 crores revised estimates for the current year. The bulk of this increase is shared about equally by the Civil Administration and Defence Services. The buoyancy of revenues except that of incometax and corporation tax which has been such a feature of the economy in the last few years has been well maintained and helped by the Increase in excise duty on cotton textiles

in September last and in some other excise and import duties, the revenues which improved from Rs 527 crores estimated in the last budget to Rs 571 crores (revised) are expected to improve still further to Rs 636 crores in the next year. The revenue account for the current year is now expected to show a surplus of Rs 38 crores, because of better revenue realisation, instead of a deficit of Rs 18 crores, as expected in the budget. In the coming year, the revenue accounts are estimated to show a deficit of Rs 27 crores.

In the current year, capital expenditure originally provided for at Rs 317 crores show a small decrease in the revised estimates at Rs 314 crores. For the next year, it is estimated at Rs 455 crores. The increase is largely accounted for by the three steel plants, the provision for which amounts to Rs 157 crores against Rs 35 crores in the current year. There has also been a substantial increase in the provision for capital outlay on railways, from Rs 104 crores in the revised budget, to Rs 124 crores. In addition to the provision for capital outlay, the esti-