



## **COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)**

### **Central Committee**

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### **Review Of the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha Elections (Adopted at the Central Committee meeting held on June 07-09, 2019)**

The verdict of the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections has given the BJP-led NDA a larger number of seats than it had won in 2014. The BJP garnered 37.4 per cent, improving from the 31 per cent it registered in 2014. The NDA vote share has gone up from 37.3 per cent to 43.86 per cent in 2019. This constitutes a decisive mandate in their favour. The rightwing offensive unleashed by the BJP during the last five years has consolidated with this mandate.

Most opposition parties barring those from Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and a few other states have suffered big reverses in these elections.

The CPI(M) and the Left have suffered a severe setback in these elections particularly in their strongholds of Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura. The CPI(M)'s declining presence in the Lok Sabha that the Central Committee has been noting since the 2009 election continues and the Party has now registered its lowest presence in the Lok Sabha till date. In terms of vote share, the decline of CPI(M)'s electoral performance began much earlier. In 1989, we had 6.6 per cent vote share. It declined to 3.2 per cent in 2014. In 2019, this would be around 2 per cent or less. (See Table I) [The Election Commission is yet to put out the final figures for the percentage of votes polled by each party. Hence, some of the figures given here are based on media reports.]

#### **BJP's Decisive Victory**

The BJP won 303 seats bettering its 2014 tally of 282. Along with its NDA partners it has won 353 seats with a vote share of 43.86 per cent.

The BJP secured more than 50 per cent of the votes polled in over 200 constituencies across the country. It crossed the half way mark in all the 26 constituencies of Gujarat, 25 constituencies of Madhya Pradesh, 23 in Rajasthan, 20 in Karnataka, all 7 in Delhi and in 9 out of 10 in Haryana.

In the states where the Congress had won the recent round of assembly elections, the BJP has swept. Post the state assembly elections, our Central

Committee analysed that though the Congress has won these assemblies, the difference in the vote share with the BJP was marginal. We had, thus, concluded that the threat posed by the communal forces continues and the offensive will surely intensify. Now the BJP has further improved its position in these states.

In Madhya Pradesh, the BJP won 28 out of the 29 seats; in Chattisgarh, the BJP has won 9 out of the 11; in Rajasthan, the BJP has won 24 out of 25; in Karnataka, where the Congress is in a coalition government with the JD(S), the BJP won 25 of the 28 seats.

Except in Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and to some degree in two other states, the BJP, under Narendra Modi's leadership, has registered similar success.

In Uttar Pradesh, BJP won 62 seats, but its vote share increased. Likewise in Bihar, BJP-JD(U)-Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP alliance won 39 seats out of the 40.

In the north-east also, the BJP has registered gains. In Assam, it won two more seats than in 2014, from 7 to 9. In other north-eastern states, the BJP won both the seats in Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. In Manipur it gained one seat. Its alliance partners won in Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim.

The BJP in Gujarat retained all 26 seats. In Himachal Pradesh it won all the 4 seats. In Uttarakhand too, the BJP won all the 5 seats. In Maharashtra, defying all expectations of the Congress-NCP alliance doing well, the BJP-Shiv Sena retained 41 of the 48 seats.

### **Congress Defeat**

The Congress failed to substantially improve its electoral performance in these elections. It could win in 52 seats improving from its 2014 position of 44 seats. It retained more or less the same poll percentage it had in 2014, with around 20 per cent of the votes polled.

The Congress party failed to put in place on the ground the unity of opposition secular parties that it was campaigning for in the run-up to the elections. In Uttar Pradesh, the Congress contested independently. As a result, the unity of the secular parties was not realised. In the states it had recently won in the assembly elections – Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh – it did not make any efforts to arrive at any electoral understanding with other parties. In Haryana and Delhi, they failed to arrive at any understanding with other opposition secular parties. As a result, amongst the people the message that went is that the opposition parties have failed to come together despite their stated objective. Further, the Congress decided to field its president from Wayanad in Kerala sending across a message that the fight against the Left is

being accorded higher priority than that against the BJP and its communal offensive. In West Bengal too the CPI(M)'s offer for a no-contest in the sitting seats of the Congress and the CPI(M) was eventually not accepted by the Congress.

In its traditional strongholds, the Congress party lost and made major gains in Tamilnadu, as a partner of the front led by the DMK, and in Kerala.

The Congress did not conduct an effective campaign for safeguarding secularism, as enshrined in the country's Constitution. The ideological offensive on this score was absent. On the contrary, many of its leaders, starting with its party president publicising events of visits to temples and mobilising *sadhus* in the campaign (like in Bhopal) blunted the edge of the ideological battle against the BJP's communal offensive. Soft Hindutva is not an answer to hardcore Hindutva. The ideological battle is between Hindutva and secularism.

The Congress, thus, failed in projecting itself as an alternative.

### **BJP's Campaign: Scripting a Nationalist Jingoistic Communal Poll Narrative**

**Consolidation of the Political Rightward Shift:** These results marked the further consolidation of the rightward political shift in India that we noted in our 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress. This is similar to the international trend which the Party Congress resolution had noted that the consolidation of the political right in many countries in the world is happening in response to meeting the situation arising out of the prolonged crisis of capitalism.

**Shifting the Poll Narrative:** The Pulwama terrorist attack and the subsequent Balakot airstrikes were utilised to the hilt by the BJP in mounting a campaign around Hindutva nationalism and rousing jingoism which provided a big boost to its electoral performance. The projection of the BJP under Narendra Modi as the protector of India against terrorism is completely divorced from the ground realities. During the last five years, the incidents of terror have exponentially grown. Between 2009-14 and 2014-19, the number of terrorist attacks increased from 109 to 626; the number of security personnel killed increased from 139 to 483; the number of civilians killed increased from 12 to 210 and the number of ceasefire violations increased from 563 to 5596.

Contrary to this reality, the BJP has succeeded in shifting the poll narrative in these elections away from the multitude of livelihood issues that have imposed misery on the people during the last five years. The impact of the agrarian distress, demonetisation, growing unemployment, the disastrous impact of GST on MSME sector and the consequent loss of employment, the overall stagnation of the economy leading to imposition of a range of burdens on the people have

all been important issues. But these were pushed into the background by scripting a narrative that was built around communal nationalist jingoism aided by the communally charged campaigns conducted all through the last five years from *ghar wapsi*, *love jihad*, cow protection etc., which sought the consolidation of the Hindutva communal vote bank by targeting minorities, particularly the Muslims and Dalits.

**Issue of Terrorism:** This narrative of BJP's communal campaign was accompanied during the elections by highlighting the issue of terrorism and the need for a government and a leadership capable of safeguarding India from the terrorist attacks across the border from Pakistan. The fight against terrorism projected as the protection of 'Hindu'-India and campaign against the 'Muslim'-Pakistan buttressed the consolidation of communal polarisation. In the final analysis, this narrative dominated the electoral discourse with Narendra Modi being projected as the "champion" to protect India. The Pulwama terrorist attack and subsequent Balakot airstrike became important elements in this emotion-charged campaign that the RSS-BJP built up.

**Consolidation of Communal Polarisation:** The offensive of communal polarization carried on during the last five years has now consolidated with this mandate. During these five years, the RSS was systematically allowed to penetrate all institutions. Educational institutions, particularly of higher education, research bodies and cultural academies saw the systematic takeover by RSS personnel. The simultaneous undermining of Constitutional authorities and independent agencies like the CBI, RBI, CVC, CIC etc., aided this process of consolidation of the communal Hindutva offensive. The partisan role of the Election Commission in the just concluded elections demonstrated the climax of such efforts.

**Building the Modi Persona:** This shift in the narrative was also aided immensely by building a larger than life Modi persona. The projection was such that he was irreplaceable for leading the country. The BJP conducted a presidential style election campaign projecting Narendra Modi. It appealed to the people to vote for Narendra Modi without any consideration for the candidate contesting from the specific constituency. This build up was achieved through a combination of factors. First, the BJP effectively used technological aids and new instruments of communication and messaging in a big way. These technological aids were backed by big data analytics that provided individual specific information for individual targeted messaging that was done from WhatsApp, Facebook and other platforms. Post-election, the BJP president boasted that they could reach out through individual messaging nearly 25 crore people in their own languages/dialects. The target of such outreach was the youth, particularly the first-time voters.

**Overarching Hindutva Identity:** The BJP-RSS orchestrated an overarching Hindu identity during the campaign which cut across, to some extent, the social and ethnic divides amongst the people. This was accompanied by micro-level social engineering to successfully combat the dominant caste based social alliances which were forged in some states. The BJP identified the non-dominant castes and individual tribal communities for targeted messaging and propaganda. This was accompanied by physically contacting voters by the RSS and its network, consolidating the BJP's outreach.

**Central Schemes:** Many of the government schemes announced personally in the name of the Prime Minister also seem to have had an impact among certain sections of the people. The direct money transfer to the kisans, the construction of toilets, the cooking gas cylinder scheme etc., might not have reached as many people as claimed by their propaganda, but nevertheless appears to have resulted in support for the BJP.

### **Massive Corporate Money and Media Power**

Of course, all these efforts could only be undertaken because of massive command over resources that the BJP built up over the last five years. This was fully aided by sections of India's big bourgeoisie who were beneficiaries of the crudest form of crony capitalism that the country has ever seen. Massive money power was utilised in these elections to incorporate sections of corporate media to project their narrative. The Centre for Media Studies has estimated, post results, that the BJP spent a whopping Rs. 27,000 crores, i.e., 45 per cent of the total expenditure in these elections. The funding through electoral bonds have reached staggering proportions. Between January and May, the total money transferred through bonds increased by Rs. 4794 crores. It needs to be particularly noted that of the bonds worth Rs. 822 crores sold by SBI in May, Rs. 370 crores, 45 per cent of the total, were issued by its Kolkata main branch. The bulk of these corporate funds have flown to the BJP coffers. With such skewed pattern of corporate funding, level playing field, an imperative for a free and fair election, is becoming an impossibility. *Electoral bonds must be scrapped.*

The BJP had systematically worked through the network of RSS organisations for over three years in identifying the candidates, establishing booth committees, deploying lakhs of paid volunteers and establishing individual contacts. Its door to door campaigns were accompanied by efforts to offer sustenance benefits from government schemes by its volunteers.

As a result of all these efforts, the BJP successfully built an alternative narrative that pushed the people's serious livelihood concerns into the background. And the projection of Modi's persona ensured that there was no alternative that was viable at the national level.

## **Support of the Ruling Classes**

Overwhelming sections of big business and corporates supported the BJP and Narendra Modi in these elections. The vicious crony capitalism pursued by the BJP government during the last five years led to a massive rise in the wealth of big corporate giants. For instance, consider a few examples: the wealth of Mukesh Ambani's industrial empire more than doubled – \$23 billion to \$55 billion – between 2014 and 2018. This meant that Mukesh Ambani accumulated more wealth in five years of BJP rule than all the wealth he made and inherited in the entire 58 years of his life before Modi became the Prime Minister.

Gautam Adani increased the assets of Adani Enterprises by 5,000 per cent in Gujarat when Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister. During the four years between 2014 and 2018, Adani's net worth more than quadrupled to \$11.9 billion from \$2.6 billion.

During the same time, Ramdev's *Patanjali* rose from being a relatively small scale activity into a billion dollar company with a net worth of more than \$6 billion in 2018. Ramdev is one among the 20 richest people in India.

Such crony capitalism placed at the disposal of the BJP humongous amount of resources for its campaign. Thousands of crores of rupees were spent on advertisements and for paid news. Use of corporate media and electronic messaging were all undertaken on a mega scale. The launching of NaMo TV illegally (permitted by the Election Commission) aided the process of building up of the larger than life persona of Narendra Modi. This propaganda blitz had an impact generally and on the youth in particular.

## **Election Commission**

The Election Commission also played a role in permitting the build up of both the alternative narrative and the Modi persona. This role of the Election Commission is ominous for Indian democracy.

The experience of these elections clearly highlights the urgent need for far reaching electoral reforms and for the reform of the Election Commission.

The current practice of the government of the day appointing Election Commissioners must be replaced by the appointments made by a collegium under the President of India's sanction.

The CPI(M) in its Election Manifesto has highlighted the issues for electoral reforms in order to strengthen democracy in the country. On the various

complaints regarding the neutrality of the EVMs and the doubts over the possible manipulation of these machines, the CPI(M) will conduct a study of such reports and, in consultation with other political parties, will decide on the future course of action.

In the coming days, the CPI(M), along with all other parties that are prepared to join, shall intensify the campaign for such reforms in order to ensure that democracy in its true spirit can be strengthened in our elections.

### **CPI(M)'s Electoral Tactical Line**

Based on the political line of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress, the Central Committee in its meeting in October 2018 spelt out the electoral tactics to be pursued by the CPI(M) for the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha election. The Central Committee noted:

*“The main task in these elections is to accomplish the following:*

*“a) To defeat the BJP alliance*

*“b) To increase the strength of the CPI(M) and the Left in the Lok Sabha; and*

*“c) To ensure that an alternative secular government is formed at the Centre.*

*“There cannot be an all India alliance to fight the BJP. We have to therefore work out state-wise election tactics based on the overall electoral tactical line. We should rally the secular and democratic forces in the different states so that the widest forces can be mobilised to defeat the BJP and its allies.*

*“We should strive to have an understanding with the non-Congress secular-regional parties who are fighting the BJP alliance. ....*

*“The Political Resolution has pointed out that our line is not of equidistance between the BJP and the Congress. Hence in states where the main contest will be between the BJP and the Congress, such as Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and others) we should fight just one or two seats and campaign generally for the defeat of the BJP.” ....and*

*“contribute towards maximizing the pooling of anti-BJP votes based on our political line”.*

Post results, it is clear that we could not achieve any of the above three tasks that we had undertaken as the basis for our campaign. Our efforts to try and arrive at an understanding with the Nationalist Congress Party in

Maharashtra for the Dindori seat and with the RJD in Bihar for the Ujiarpur seat could not succeed. The only state in which an understanding with regional parties could take place was in Tamilnadu where we contested two and won both.

## **CPI(M)'s Performance**

### **Kerala**

The CPI(M) has suffered a setback in the election. Out of the 20 Lok Sabha seats, the Party and the LDF got only one seat. The Party lost in many of its strong seats. The Party had a similar reverse in the 1977 Lok Sabha elections after Emergency when it could not get a single seat.

The vote share of the LDF declined from 40.2 per cent in 2014 to 35.1 per cent in 2019 – a fall of 5.1 per cent votes. The number of votes of the LDF declined from 72,11,257 in 2014 to 71,56,387 in 2019 – a decline of 54,870 votes. The vote share of the UDF increased from 42.04 per cent in 2014 to 47.23 per cent in 2019 – an increase of 5.19 per cent votes. The number of votes increased from 75,46,830 in 2014 to 96,28,034 in 2019 – an increase of 20,81,204 votes. The NDA votes increased from 10.8 per cent in 2014 to 15.56 per cent in 2019 – an increase of 4.76 per cent votes. The number of votes of the NDA increased from 19,44,204 in 2014 to 31,71,738 in 2019 – an increase of 12,27,534 votes. While the LDF lost 54,870 votes, UDF gained 20,81,204 votes and NDA 12,27,534 votes.

There is an increase of 3.48 per cent of votes polled in 2019 compared to 2014 elections – an increase of 24,32,861 votes.

In 2016 assembly elections, the vote share of the LDF was 43.35 per cent (87,25,934 votes), UDF was 38.8 per cent (78,08,743 votes) and NDA was 15.01 per cent (30,20,886 votes). Compared to 2016 assembly elections, 0.33 per cent more votes polled in 2019 (2,54,758 votes). In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, LDF votes decreased by 15,69,973 as compared to the 2016 assembly elections. On the other hand, UDF votes increased by 18,19,291 and that of the NDA by 1,50,852 . Out of the 140 assembly constituencies, LDF has led only in 16 segments, UDF in 123 and NDA in 1, where they won in the last assembly election.

The voting pattern in Lok Sabha election has always been different from the assembly election in Kerala. This time, the fear of the BJP and Narendra Modi forming a government at the Centre caused a bigger shift among the secular and democratic minded sections in favour of the UDF, particularly among Muslim and Christian minorities. The campaign by the UDF to form a secular government at the Centre and to make Congress the single largest party in



Parliament facilitated this shift. The decision to field Rahul Gandhi from Wayanad was taken to further enhance this appeal.

Due to the weakening of the Party and the Left at the all-India level and particularly the defeats in West Bengal and Tripura, the slogan to strengthen the Left presence in Parliament so that the Left could play an important role in forming a secular government did not carry conviction among the people.

The Party and the LDF government took a firm position supporting the Supreme Court verdict allowing the entry of women to Sabarimala temple, irrespective of their age. The stand taken by the Party and the LDF government was correct and the Party and the LDF government could not take a different stand other than to uphold the Supreme Court verdict ensuring gender equality. To make use of the confusion among a section of devotees, the Congress, RSS and BJP reversed their earlier position of supporting the Supreme Court verdict and organised a virulent campaign against the Party and the LDF government. They were able to wean away a section of our traditional supporters. The entry of two women into the temple after the Women's Wall programme was also utilised by the UDF and BJP. The impact of this campaign among our supporters varied from area to area. Those alienated from us voted for the Congress or the BJP in varied ways in different constituencies.

To ensure the defeat of the CPI(M) and the Left, the BJP has always been transferring a portion of its votes in favour of the UDF. This time too, other than in five constituencies – Thiruvananthapuram, Attingal, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur and Palakkad – BJP transferred a portion of its votes in favour of the UDF.

By and large, there was good appreciation among the people about the overall performance of the LDF government. Why we have failed to transform the appreciation of the people into electoral support is a matter that has to be looked into and areas identified where remedial steps need to be taken.

The UDF, the BJP and the dominant media organized a vicious campaign against the Party that it is solely responsible for the political violence in Kerala. Though the CPI(M) has borne the brunt of political violence, the UDF, BJP and the media were able to make use of some incidents to tarnish the Party. The Party must ensure that such opportunities do not arise for our opponents to label the Party as perpetrators of political violence.

Even after the polling, comrades in Kerala were hopeful of getting a majority of seats. However, we lost a majority of seats with a margin of around a lakh or more votes. Why we failed to understand the mood of the people is a matter of serious concern. The state committee should take appropriate steps to rectify the mistakes and shortcomings.

Though the efforts of the BJP to win seats in Kerala failed, the NDA was able to get 15.56 per cent of votes, even after transferring a portion of their votes to UDF. This is a matter of serious concern. Patient and concerted political, ideological and organisational work is necessary to contain the growth of BJP in Kerala. Further, the voting strength of the Party was eroded in some of its traditional bases. The Party should seriously examine about why its base is not expanding despite the hard work of the Party and the good performance of the government.

## **West Bengal**

The Party suffered a very severe setback in the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections. This result is the worst electoral performance in the Party's history. According to provisional calculations, the CPI(M) polled 6.28 per cent while the Left Front polled 7.44 per cent. This is a decline for the Left Front from 2014 where it polled 29.61 per cent. The decline is of 22.17 per cent. In the 2016 assembly elections, the Left Front had polled 26.30 per cent. In these elections (2016 assembly elections), the Left Front contested two-thirds of the seats while one-third was left as part of an understanding for the Congress. If the vote in the other one-third is added then the Left Front plus Congress plus LF independents, the percentage comes to 39.43. There is, thus, a massive decline in our vote percentage in these elections.

The Trinamool Congress polled 43.28 per cent compared to 39.35 per cent in 2014 and 45.01 per cent in 2016. The BJP polled 40.25 per cent in these elections compared to 16.84 per cent in 2014 which dropped to 10.16 in 2016. While the Trinamool Congress has improved its percentage marginally, this is attributed mainly to rigging and prevention of opposition votes from being polled. The BJP however secured a very high increase of over 23 per cent in its vote share.

During the last eight years, the CPI(M) had to face intense fascistic terror attacks at the hands of the Trinamool Congress. Out of the 214 Left activists murdered, 209 are CPI(M) activists. Many thousands had to live in exile leaving their families and properties. Threats and intimidation continued to be intensified. Despite these exacting and adverse circumstances lakhs of Party members and activists campaigned in these elections.

There was a high degree of anti-incumbency that the Trinamool Congress was facing. The BJP reaped the benefit of it in a substantial measure. The CPI(M) and the Left Front were not seen as a force that could offer an alternative to the Trinamool while the BJP backed by the Central government and with its propaganda bombardment was perceived as the alternative.

The 2018 local body elections were marred by intense violence and rigging, making a complete mockery of democracy. Unheard of practices like preventing people from filing nominations through largescale violence and terror, including post-election rigging was indulged in. The Trinamool won more than 40,000 seats without contest. Such unprecedented terror was unleashed to influence the 2019 parliament elections. But this experience had only deepened the spread of anti-Trinamool sentiments among the people who were kept under check through terror.

Post the panchayat elections the CPI(M) and the Left conducted many sustained movements and struggles all over the state which saw the participation of large numbers of working people, particularly the kisans, the working class and youth. The culmination of this was the unprecedented February 2019 Brigade rally. While our struggles continued to draw response from the people and their participation grew, this was not translated into votes as the people generally saw the primacy of defeating the TMC and on that score the CPI(M) and the Left Front were not seen as the viable alternative.

The Party contested these elections on the basis of the electoral line worked out by the Central Committee on the basis of the Political Line adopted by the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress. The Party had given a call for the ousting of the “Modi government to save India and ousting of the Trinamool to save Bengal”. In order to achieve this objective, the Central Committee had decided that the electoral tactics to be employed must be directed towards maximising the pooling of anti-TMC, anti-BJP votes.

On this basis, with the Central Committee’s approval, the West Bengal state committee proposed to the Congress party that there should be no mutual contest on sitting seats. Further, the state committee identified 20 priority seats apart from the two sitting seats where the Party must contest. Other partners of the Left Front in West Bengal traditionally contest 10 seats. In the rest of the eight seats it was decided that the best candidate capable of defeating both the TMC and BJP would be identified and supported by us. Eventually, CPI(M) contested 31 seats, the Left partners 9, making it a total of 40 out of the 42. The Congress party won the other two seats where the Left Front did not contest, which already it held as its sitting seats.

The Congress party did not accept the no mutual contest proposal of ours. This further strengthened the perception among the people that the Left Front would not be a viable alternative against the TMC. During the course of the 2016 assembly elections, the BJP president had publicly declared that the BJP is not interested in the assembly elections but will concentrate on the Lok Sabha elections. This in a sense facilitated the return to power by the TMC and this opportunity was used to the hilt by the BJP to penetrate among the people of Bengal. During this period the RSS shakhas and units multiplied manifold in the

state. This further intensified the propaganda of communal polarization which the BJP had been undertaking in the state for some years now. Aggressive communal polarization took on various forms. The BJP openly conducted programmes on Ram Navami, Hanuman Jayanti etc., in an aggressive manner, providing swords and other weapons to children in public demonstrations. The Trinamool entered into competition by organising parallel events for Ram Navami, Hanuman Jayanti and other Hindu festivals. This came in the background of the already established perception that the TMC had mobilised the minority community through various measures of appeasement and the communal divide was thus strengthened creating a situation of intense polarisation. Post 2016 assembly elections, 47 communal conflicts, unknown to West Bengal under the Left Front government, took place.

These elections were fought in this intense polarised atmosphere with both BJP and the TMC seeking to reap dividends from such communal polarisation.

The Party state committee conducted a preliminary review of these results.

These elections constitute the worst setback for the Party in West Bengal. The political-organisational weaknesses that were identified in the preliminary review must be earnestly dealt with. Many important organisational measures have to be undertaken mainly to regain the confidence of the people. The perception of some sections of the people who voted BJP to defeat TMC is a gross underestimation of the threat posed by the communal forces and is contrary to the understanding of the Party Congress and the Central Committee's electoral tactical line. The preliminary review by the state committee has shown that though Party members and activists were not involved in such a voting pattern, sections of our traditional voters could have acted in this manner. The state committee needs to undertake serious examination of the efforts made to arrest such a trend. An examination is also required to be undertaken to assess if sections of our support base have been influenced by the communal forces. This section will have to be brought back to our fold.

The Party must take the necessary steps to bolster its independent strength. Sustained grassroot mobilisations on issues of people's concerns must be planned and executed. The main thrust of our campaigns must be to combat the scourge of growing communalism ideologically, politically and organisationally. Of course, the anti-people policies and the terror unleashed by the state government and the ruling party will be an important element of our campaign.

## **Tripura**

The Lok Sabha election in Tripura was held in the background of continuing terror and violence against the CPI(M) and the Left Front which began after the 2018 assembly elections.

The ruling BJP adopted a combination of terror tactics, efforts to polarise the voters on communal lines and alluring voters with various government schemes and benefits.

The election was held in two phases for the two constituencies. The first phase election held in Tripura West constituency was marred by total rigging by armed gangs of the BJP. Confining voters in select areas within their houses and localities, driving away Left Front voters from booths, preventing polling agents and capturing of booths and manipulating votes took place on a large scale. More than half the total number of booths were affected in this manner. After the polling, our Party demanded repolling in 846 booths. The Election Commission first considered ordering repolling in more than 400 booths, but finally ordered repoll in 168 booths only. In this repolling held on May 12, again there was large scale intimidation and rigging of polls.

Because of this, the state committee in its review of the elections has stated that it is meaningless to review the results of the Tripura West constituency.

The Tripura East constituency election was postponed from April 18 to 23 after large-scale rigging in the first phase of polling. It should be kept in mind that even in the Tripura East constituency out of 1,645 polling booths, in 27 per cent of them, i.e., 443, the Left Front could not post polling agents and the BJP cast fake votes in most of these booths. The BJP won this seat polling 4,82,126 votes i.e., 46.32 per cent of the votes polled; the Congress came second polling 2,77,836 votes i.e., 26.69 per cent; the CPI(M) came third polling 2,00,963 i.e., 19.31 per cent; the IPFT got 45,304 i.e., 4.35 per cent.

Our vote was greatly reduced in this constituency. While we got approximately 45 per cent in the last assembly election, this time we polled only 19.31 per cent, a reduction of 25.57 per cent.

Apart from the strongarm tactics and intimidation against the CPI(M) and Left Front voters, the BJP utilised huge money and most of the print and electronic media in its favour and social media in a big way. The BJP strongly advocated the Citizenship Amendment Bill. Since many of the non-tribal people of the state have their relatives still in Bangladesh, the provisions of the Bill evoked support among a section of the non-tribal people for the BJP.

An increase in the votes for the Congress was due to the following reasons. The main thrust of our campaign was to defeat the BJP and replace it with a secular government. Those who wanted to remove the BJP from power at the Centre

saw the Congress as a viable party for this. Such thinking prevailed over a big section of the Muslim minorities including among those who had voted for us in the last assembly election.

The Congress campaign sought to project tribal identity and opposition to the Citizenship Amendment Bill. The Congress candidate was the granddaughter of the last king and this created sentiments in favour of the royal tribal family. As a result, a section of our tribal voters and of IPFT supporters voted for the Congress. The BJP has been targeting mainly the CPI(M) in its terror campaign and has spared the Congress from such attacks.

The main reason for the poor performance of our Party has been our inability to conduct an effective election campaign and reach the people because of the abnormal position prevailing. Over the last 14 months, 50 to 60 of the local committees and majority of Party branches were not functional, resulting in a large number of Party members remaining inactive, because of the reign of terror.

However, our support among the tribal people in our traditional areas has decreased substantially. This erosion in our support base among the people was noticed earlier during the village committee elections under the autonomous district council. Appeal of tribal identity and sectarian ideology has grown among the tribal youth and among the middle class. The weakness of our ideological work among these sections became evident.

Post poll violence has been widespread in the state. The ruling party let loose vicious attacks after the counting of votes. The attacks began in the counting centres against our counting agents and has continued in various places. Attacks were mounted on Party and mass organisation offices, on houses and shops, on polling agents and leading activists.

Protecting the Party organisation, members and supporters and reestablishing live contacts with the people are among the main tasks in the post-election period.

### **Other States**

As a result of being part of the DMK-led alliance in Tamilnadu, we won both the seats that we contested. In other states, the performance has been very unsatisfactory with a decline in our vote share. Only in Maharashtra we polled a bigger vote in Dindori constituency than earlier and crossed the one lakh mark. The Kisan Long March had helped in mobilising the rural tribal sections here. The details of all the 71 seats we contested are given in Table II.

**Tamilnadu:** The CPI(M) entered into an electoral understanding with the DMK and became a part in the DMK alliance in Tamilnadu. On the basis of this understanding, the CPI(M) contested two seats – Madurai and Coimbatore. The CPI(M) won both these seats.

In Coimbatore, the Party polled 5,71,150 votes which is 45.66 per cent of the vote share. In Madurai, the Party polled 4,47,075 votes with a 44 per cent vote share. The overall vote percentage in the state is 2.40.

In **Maharashtra**, we contested Dindori seat on our own. The seat sharing talks with the Nationalist Congress Party failed as the NCP was not willing to part with the Dindori seat. The other seat which we considered, Palghar, saw a strong independent candidate whom we supported in return for their promised support in the Assembly constituencies which are due for elections within months.

We polled 1,09,570 votes as against 72,599 in 2014. Our polling percentage increased from 7.48 in 2014 to 9.63 and we came in 3<sup>rd</sup> position.

In **Rajasthan**, where our vote increased in the last assembly elections and we won in two seats, we contested three parliamentary constituencies. In Sikar, we polled 31,462 (2.37 per cent) votes compared to 53,134 (4.98 per cent) votes in 2014. In Churu, we polled 25,090 (1.89 per cent) votes. In the assembly elections, in Bhadra assembly constituency under this parliamentary seat, we had polled 81,655 and won the seat. In this parliament election, the total vote in eight assembly constituencies is the above. In Bikaner, we polled 8,997 (0.82 per cent) votes. We had won the Shri Dungargarh assembly seat under this parliamentary constituency by polling 73,376 votes. Clearly, the voting pattern in the assembly elections and the parliament elections is vastly different. The Party Centre had advised the Rajasthan State Committee to reconsider contesting those parliamentary seats under which the assembly segments we had won fall. The state committee however insisted on contesting.

In **Andhra Pradesh**, we contested in two seats in alliance with Jana Sena of film actor Pavan Kalyan. In both the seats we polled a very low vote. In Nellore, we got 18,830 (1.46 per cent) votes and were in 3<sup>rd</sup> position. In Kurnool, we got 18,919 (1.6 per cent) votes and were in 5<sup>th</sup> position. Overall in the state, our vote percentage is 0.12.

We contested two seats in **Telangana** in an understanding with the CPI. In Khammam, we polled 57,102 (5.01 per cent) votes and ranked third. In Nalgonda, we polled 25,089 (2.13 per cent) votes and ranked fourth. The overall voting percentage in the state is 0.44.

In **Assam**, we contested two seats – Kokrajhar and Lakhimpur. In Kokrajhar we polled 28,128 (1.9 per cent) votes and ranked fifth. In Lakhimpur, CPI also contested and polled 13,378 votes. Here we polled 12,809 (1 per cent) votes and ranked fifth.

In **Bihar**, our efforts for an understanding with the RJD did not materialize. In the lone seat we contested – Ujiarpur in Samastipur district – our vote share declined by half. We polled 27,577 (2.85 per cent) votes compared to 53,044 (6.18 per cent) in 2014.

In Mandi constituency in **Himachal Pradesh**, we polled 14,838 (1.58 per cent) votes, which is a slight increase from 13,965 (1.92 per cent) votes we polled in 2014. But in terms of percentage, there is a decline.

In **Haryana**, in the lone seat we contested, we polled 9,150 as against 6,533 in 2014. Our voting percentage has gone up from 0.56 to 0.78.

In **Karnataka**, we contested in Chikkaballapur where our vote reduced from 26,071 to 18,648 and the percentage from 2.06 to 1.34.

In **Madhya Pradesh**, we contested the Rewa seat polling 10,453 votes (1.03 per cent).

In **Odisha**, we contested the Bhubaneswar parliamentary seat polling 23,026 (2.29 per cent). Initially, the state committee came to an understanding for Congress support in return for our support to their Lok Sabha candidate in Sundergarh. However, it is not clear whether this was translated into votes.

In **Jharkhand**, we contested the Rajmahal seat polling 35,586 votes, down from 58,034 in 2014. Voting percentage declined from 6.1 to 3.4.

In **Uttarakhand**, we contested the Tehri Garhwal seat. Our vote marginally increased but our vote percentage fell from 0.85 to 0.76.

We did not field any candidate in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Chattisgarh and Andaman & Nicobar where we had contested in 2014.

### **State Assembly Elections**

In the elections to the state assemblies in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and the by-elections in West Bengal, the Party's performance has been below par.

The lone exception to this trend was the result in Odisha. We could retain the sitting Bonnai seat polling 59,939 votes (34.67 per cent). In 2014 we had polled



39,125 votes. There is a substantial improvement in our voting strength (See Table III).

Initially there was an understanding that the Congress will support us in this assembly seat in return for our support to their Lok Sabha candidate under which Bonnai falls. However, a rebel Congress candidate was in the fray negating this understanding. (The details are given in Table-III)

### **Continuing Decline of our Independent Strength**

These results, coming after the reverses in the earlier two elections, are a very clear pointer to the fact that our independent strength and political intervention capacities have declined in a big way. There has been an overall further decline in the vote share in the seats that we contested. Except in Tamilnadu and in a limited manner in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, in no other state, could we have any electoral understanding or an alliance with regional parties.

The decline of our vote share in our strong states is a matter of great concern. The preliminary reviews conducted by the state committees have been noted above. However, none of these contain an assessment of how our basic classes – working class, peasantry and the agricultural labour – voted. A deeper review to understand both the alienation of the people from us and the desertion of sections of our traditional vote is required. There are certain weaknesses that we must not only note but rectify.

1) During the past few years, the class and mass organisations of the Party have been active in launching popular movements and struggles. This, however, was uneven across the country and not sustained. The working class had gone on a joint two-day industrial strike with the participation of close to six crore workers in the country. The kisan front had conducted big movements on issues of agrarian distress, Long March in Maharashtra, the struggles in Rajasthan culminating in the big worker-peasant-agricultural worker rally at Delhi.

This period also saw big popular mobilisations in our stronger states. Kerala witnessed the historic 56 lakh women's wall. West Bengal held an unprecedented massive Brigade Parade rally by the Left Front. This was preceded by a series of mass activities that criss-crossed the state. All these saw a larger participation than earlier. In Tripura, despite the most adverse conditions, the Party has been able to conduct some political programmes.

Clearly, all the sections mobilised in these popular struggles have not translated into votes for the CPI(M)/Left. The weaknesses persisting in politicisation of the people who participate in our struggles needs to be urgently overcome. The

inability to do so will only widen the gap between the participation in struggles initiated by us and voting at the time of elections.

2) Our appeal to the youth continues to be restricted. We had noted this in successive Party Congresses and decided on measures to address and overcome the situation. Clearly, either they have not been implemented, or, they have not succeeded. Neo-liberalism, by itself, imposes conditions leading to the depoliticisation of youth. Privatisation of education has led to a ban on political activities amongst students in private educational institutions. In the government universities, colleges and schools, the democratic right of the students to have their students' union elections has been severely restricted all across the country. The phenomenal growth of tutorial colleges debarring political activity, has ensured that crores of youngsters are separated from acquiring any political consciousness. Despite the record high unemployment levels, we are not able to draw youth into militant actions.

Under these circumstances, the major way to reach the youth has been through the social media and modern technological communication tools. The BJP has successfully utilised these tools to spread its message and influence the youth. Our Party should urgently address this issue and adopt necessary measures, both at the national and state levels.

3) In the urban areas, our appeal is declining both amongst the urban poor and in the middle classes. We had earlier taken some decisions to rectify the situation. But these have not yet yielded any result.

4) In many constituencies, the total votes polled by us is less than the total membership of our class and mass organisations. Even taking into account the overlap of membership, this gap once again informs us that the process of politicisation of our own mass organisation membership is far from adequate.

### **Lessons to be Drawn**

The uncomfortable conclusion that must be drawn from this electoral performance by the Party is that the decline in the independent mass base of the Party, as noted in successive Party Congresses recently, has further deepened. These poor election results indicate that the Party has failed to expand its political influence, increase its organisational strength and functioning and develop its political intervention capacities. The Polit Bureau and Central leadership must take the responsibility for this failure.

(i) The Kolkata Plenum in December 2015 had adopted a resolution and a report on the measures to be taken to streamline and strengthen our organisation in order to enable the Party to adopt a mass line. Clearly, many of these decisions have not been put into practice.

A thorough review of the implementation of the Plenum decisions must be undertaken. The Central Committee in its June 2018 meeting had decided, as per the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress decision, that all the state committees should conduct a review of the implementation of the tasks set out by the state committee and extended meetings for a period of one year. This was to be done within six months. i.e., by October 2018.

However, most state committees have not undertaken the review of the implementation of the Plenum tasks set out in their reports.

This must be undertaken within the next three months i.e., by end August 2019, without fail.

The Organization Sub-Committee will have to study the reports and prepare a future course of action to be placed before the Central Committee.

(ii) Despite successive resolutions highlighting the need for independent and democratic functioning of mass organisations, in practice, this has not been implemented. The Polit Bureau members, in-charge of these class and mass organisations, in consultation with the All India Fractions, must suggest specific time bound measures to be implemented, both with regard to the personnel to discharge specific responsibilities and the agenda priorities before the concerned mass organisations.

(iii) In all the states and at the national level, a broad-based effort must be undertaken to utilise all available technological tools and devices, including social media, in order to strengthen the network of electronic communication at all levels of the Party.

(iv) Both at the level of the Party as well as mass organisations, on burning issues before the people, plans must be drawn up for the launching of popular struggles independently and in association with likeminded parties and social forces.

(v) The committee for work in urban areas must chalk out an agenda for Party's intervention in order to rally the ever-growing sections of urban poor and the middle classes.

### **New Challenges**

The country and the people must brace themselves for the imminent challenges that are bound to be mounted with such a decisive BJP victory in these elections.

a) With the backing of international capital and domestic corporates, this new BJP government is bound to intensify exploitation of the people through neo-liberal economic reforms. The indications have already come for large-scale privatisation of the public sector, labour law reforms, creation of land banks to legalise the acquisition of agricultural land from the farmers etc etc. On the vast majority of our working people, economic assaults are bound to grow. The Party must take the lead in rallying the maximum sections of the people and launching struggles on these issues.

b) Given the consolidation of Hindutva communal polarisation, that has happened in these elections, the offensive of the communal forces is bound to sharpen further. The protection of the Constitutional rights of the religious and linguistic minorities, their security concerns and issues of livelihood improvement must be championed by the Party. The defence and strengthening of secular democracy, as enshrined in the Constitution, must be a constant in our campaigns.

c) The process of undermining the Constitutional authorities, its independent institutions and regulatory mechanisms under the Constitution is bound to further intensify. This is necessary for the RSS, whose takeover of these institutions will be further strengthened, in order to convert the secular democratic Constitutional Republic into their ideological project of the 'Hindutva Rashtra'. The defence and strengthening of the authorities under the Constitution must form a permanent feature of our campaigns.

d) The attacks on the democratic rights and civil liberties of the people are bound to intensify. Consequent to the campaign conducted by the RSS-BJP in these elections, the efforts to establish a 'security' state in India will increasingly infringe upon the rights of individuals and their elementary right of dissent. Already ominous indications are being made by BJP leaders in this direction.

With the intensification of neo-liberal reforms, the rights of the working class and other sections of the working people, particularly the peasantry and rural workers, will come under relentless attack.

The activities of private armies, under one pretext or the other, will intensify, depriving people of their Constitutional rights. Dissent will be sought to be suppressed through legal harassment leading up to witch-hunting. This challenge must be squarely met and defeated by the Party by taking the lead in mobilising the largest segment of our people who cherish democratic rights and civil liberties.

## **Tasks**

In order to meet these challenges noted above, it is essential that the Party:

- 1) Must launch extensive and intensive struggles of the working class, peasantry and agricultural workers on their burning issues. The efforts for joint worker-peasant-agricultural worker actions that had taken place in the recent past must be further strengthened and concrete programmes of action must be worked out.
- 2) Must go amongst the people in a big way by stepping up mass activities, launching struggles on local issues and to realize the Plenum objective of a 'revolutionary party with a mass line'. Party leaders must take the lead in going to the people.
- 3) Must draw large sections of youth who have participated in our election campaigns into mass organisations. These new sections and the activists among them must be recruited into the Party.
- 4) The unity of the Left forces must be strengthened and, for this, discussions should be held with the concerned Left parties; there should be closer coordination between the Communist parties.
- 5) Must strengthen our ideological campaigns. Particular focus must be to ideologically combat communalism. The spread of scientific temper is an essential part of this campaign given the growth of obscurantism, superstition etc., spread by the communal forces.
- 6) Must take the initiative to rally the widest possible sections on issue based programmes to meet the challenges noted above.
- 7) The issues of protection of minority rights and security; against dalit atrocities and protection of their rights; gender and issues of social oppression against women; and issues concerning the tribal communities in the country must be vigorously championed. The broad platforms that have been set-up by us must actively reach out to likeminded forces in these activities.
- 8) Must incorporate urgently modern communication methods and tools in the Party's day-to-day work.
- 9) Must address urgently the lessons drawn above and rectify our weaknesses in order to strengthen Party's independent organisational and political intervention capacities.
- 10) Must build up a broad front of intellectuals, educationists along with student organization in the fight against the New Education Policy.
- 11) Must organise specific targeted programmes on the issue of growing unemployment.
- 12) Our Party in Bengal and Tripura must be galvanised to meet the challenges and attacks mounted by the BJP in Tripura and the Trinamool-BJP in West Bengal. Post elections, efforts to destabilise the LDF government in Kerala will intensify. The Party must strengthen campaigns for upholding principles of Federalism and stand in solidarity with the Kerala state government.

## **Conclusion**

These elections have consolidated the political rightwing offensive in the country. It is only the political Left that can effectively resist the rightward consolidation. The CPI(M) and the Left are the consistent ideological, political and organizational force to counter the rightwing offensive. This has been done in the past in the most adverse circumstances. This struggle will be carried forward in today's difficult conditions. It is neither with demoralisation nor defeatism, but, with redoubled vigour and determination, that the CPI(M) will take concrete measures to overcome its weaknesses and strengthen itself and the Left.

As Communists, we are dedicated to achieve the objective of establishing an exploitation-free society through basic political/social changes. We shall go back to the people, learn from them and establish live links with them and champion their concerns. We shall win back people who have moved away from us.

The struggles against the ideology and politics of the RSS-BJP will be relentlessly carried forward by the Party. The Party will forge a united resistance against the neo-liberal policies that are ruining people's livelihood. Such struggles will be intensified along with the struggles for the defence of democracy and democratic rights of the people. The Party will utilise all its strength to build and advance the Left and democratic forces.