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Review Report of Lok Sabha Elections, 2004

*(Adopted by the Central Committee meeting held between
July 30-August 01, 2004 at New Delhi)*

1. The 14th Lok Sabha elections have resulted in a significant victory for the secular-democratic and Left forces. After six years in office, the BJP-led alliance was defeated. The Party can take legitimate pride that the three main objectives set out by it have been achieved. They are: firstly, the defeat of the BJP and its allies; secondly, the formation of a secular government at the Centre; and thirdly, increasing the strength of the CPI(M) and the Left in the Lok Sabha. The overall results are as follows:

The Congress party got 145 seats and alongwith its pre-poll allies, it has a strength of 219. The BJP got 138 seats and alongwith its allies, it has got 189 seats. The CPI(M) won 44 seats, the CPI – 10, the RSP – 3, Forward Bloc – 3. The Left parties had won a total of 61 seats including Kerala Congress(J). The Samajwadi Party has won 36 seats. The BSP has won 19 seats. All the parties which played a role in defeating the BJP-led alliance have got around 340 seats.

For the six national parties, in terms of percentage of votes, the Congress got 26.69 per cent (contesting 417 seats), BJP - 22.16 per cent (364 seats), CPI(M) - 5.69 per cent (69 seats), BSP - 5.35 per cent (435 seats), CPI - 1.4 per cent (34 seats) and NCP – 1.78 per cent (32 seats). According to the preliminary estimates, the BJP plus its allies got 35.9 per cent votes, which is a drop of 4.9 per cent from 1999. The Congress party forged an alliance and the percentage of the Congress-led alliance is 35.8, which is a 2 per cent increase over last time.

2. The BJP had called for elections earlier than scheduled in the hope that it could carry the momentum of its victories in the Assembly elections to Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh. The Telugu Desam Party had also decided in November 2003 to advance the Assembly elections. The BJP and its allies were confident of returning to power given their

massive resources. The launching of the 'India Shining' campaign was an indication of how they expected the people to respond to their record of government. Having pursued a host of pro-rich policies and the 'feel good' factor among a small section of the people who are affluent, the BJP committed the fundamental error of misreading the people's mood.

The BJP was taken aback by the results and the defeat it suffered. It is still to come to terms with the defeat as witnessed by the recent Mumbai national executive meeting of the party. It has decided to fall back on its Hindutva ideology and platform. It is unable to understand the real reasons for its defeat. These reasons must be identified if the verdict is to be understood properly.

- i) A major reason for the BJP's defeat is the communal and divisive policies promoted by the BJP and its open patronage to RSS outfits like the VHP and the Bajrang Dal. The Gujarat pogrom opened the eyes of a section of the people who had some illusions about the BJP. The minorities, both Muslim and Christian, were further alienated with the minority baiting activities of the RSS combine.
- ii) Another major reason is the impact of the economic policies pursued by the Vajpayee government which led to the erosion of support among different sections of the people. The policies of neo-liberal reforms and the anti-people policies affected all sections of the people. The worst hit were the farmers and rural poor; workers and middle classes in the urban areas were also badly affected. As a result of the skewed type of growth, unemployment increased rapidly which alienated the youth, women and all sections of working people. The BJP -- blinded by the praise of the corporate sector, the big business, the media-controlled by them and the international investors -- refused to modify or reverse any of the anti-people policies. It paid a heavy price for its unflinching commitment to the big bourgeoisie and foreign finance capital.
- iii) The BJP's shameless wooing of the United States hurt patriotic sentiments. More and more, through their experience, the people could make out some connection between the pro-imperialist stance and the adverse effects on their livelihood. Though they could not fully grasp this linkage, they were able to vaguely understand that the Vajpayee government had accorded more priority to foreign interests than their own.

- iv) Another reason for the defeat was the rejection of some of its major allies like the TDP and the AIADMK. Their state governments pursued anti-people policies with the Chandrababu Naidu government's World Bank's structural adjustment programme and the Jayalalitha government's series of onslaughts on the rights of the people and their livelihood.
- v) The 'party with a difference' was the claim of the BJP. But its six-year rule proved that it was corrupt to the core and its leadership arrogantly displayed its newly acquired wealth and pro-rich outlook.

During the BJP rule, a number of struggles were conducted against the Vajpayee government's reactionary policies. The Party, the trade union and the mass organisations independently and unitedly with other Left and democratic forces conducted innumerable struggles. There were a number of strike struggles against the privatisation stream and in defence of the public system. To defend the right to strike, there was a countrywide general strike on February 24, 2004 which saw the participation of millions of employees and workers. The struggles of different sections of the working people contributed to the crystallisation of the discontent against the BJP-led government and to the erosion of its support base.

Apart from the wipe out of the BJP allies in Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh, the BJP has also lost heavily in Uttar Pradesh (19 seats), Bihar and Jharkhand (18). The BJP got only 10 out of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh. Further, it lost in Mathura, Varanasi and Ayodhya (Faizabad) -- all the three places which are the centres for its temple-mosque disputes.

It is significant to note that the BJP has lost in major urban centres which were its strongholds. This indicates also a loss of support among those sections of the middle class who traditionally supported it. For instance, in Mumbai, the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance could win only one out of the six seats; in Delhi, it could win only one out of the 7 seats. In Kolkata and Chennai, it is not a strong force anyway. It lost in Hyderabad, Varanasi, Allahabad, Guwahati, Patna, Kanpur etc. The exceptions among the major cities were Ahmedabad and Bangalore. The BJP lost ground among women and youth. Because of the deep cuts in the interest rates of banks and savings deposits, senior citizens turned against them in large numbers.

While noting this erosion in BJP's support, it must be said, however, that the BJP has maintained its support among the tribals particularly the areas where it made recent inroads. The BJP was able to win in the tribal belts in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Orissa.

3. Congress Performance

The Congress has gained mainly due to the realisation that it needs alliances and by forging an understanding with various parties. In Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Bihar, Jharkhand and to some extent in Maharashtra, alliances helped the Congress. The Congress efforts at alliances rewarded it with 74 seats brought in by its allies and an additional 9.1 per cent vote to the combined tally. The Congress was able to retain its position more or less in Assam, where it won 9 seats compared to 10 in 1999. Another state where it has a state government where it did well is Himachal Pradesh where it won 3 of the 4 seats polling 51.9 per cent of the vote. It also swept Haryana winning 9 out of the 10 seats. The INLD of Chautala was routed.

The Congress lost in Kerala, Punjab and Karnataka. It lost the Assembly elections too in Karnataka. This is mainly due to the record and policies of the state governments run by it. There is a lesson for the Congress here that if it pursues the policies of liberalisation and privatisation, it loses popular support.

Though the Congress party alongwith its allies won 219 seats, its own performance in terms of the increase in seats is not substantial. It won 145 seats which is 33 more than in 1999. With this, it has only recovered its 1998 Lok Sabha position when it had 141 seats. The Congress is still a weak force in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Tamilnadu where on its own, it can win only a few seats.

4. Other parties

The Samajwadi Party won the largest number of seats in Uttar Pradesh getting 35 out of the 80. It won one more seat in Uttaranchal. The BSP has come second with 19 seats. The BJP got only 10 seats. The Congress got 9 seats but got 12 per cent of the vote. In terms of percentage of votes, the BSP has registered an increase from 22 to 24.7 per cent. The Samajwadi Party has got 26.7 per cent of the votes (+2.7 per cent over 1999) and alongwith its ally, the RLD, a total of 31.2 per cent in Uttar Pradesh. The BSP has received 4.8 per cent in Madhya Pradesh, 3.1 per cent in Maharashtra where it has got a chunk of scheduled caste votes in Vidarbha

that led to the defeat of the Congress in its traditional strongholds. In Punjab, the BSP has got 7.7 per cent votes. The BSP is making some headway outside Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab as seen by its performance in Vidarbha (Maharashtra), where it seeks to replace the Republican parties among the dalits. Overall, it contested 355 seats and got 5.33 per cent of the votes polled all over the country. The AGP, which had suffered an electoral debacle in the 1999 Lok Sabha election and the 2001 Assembly polls, made some recovery. It won 2 seats and got 19.9 per cent of the vote. It fought independently after failing to get the BJP to have an understanding with it.

5. Our Performance

The Party had won 44 seats (including one supported independent). This is the highest ever tally in the Lok Sabha elections so far. This is a recognition by the people of the firm and consistent role the Party has played in the fight against the communal forces, in struggling the economic policies of the BJP-led government which harmed the interests of the people and for opposing its pro-American, pro-imperialist line. The Party has got 5.69 per cent (contesting 69 seats) of the total valid votes polled in the country. This represents a 0.3 per cent increase compared to 1999 elections when it got 5.38 per cent votes. The breakup of the seats are as follows: West Bengal – 26, Kerala – 13, Tripura – 2, Tamilnadu – 2, Andhra Pradesh – 1.

West Bengal : The overall polling percentage was 78.0 per cent which is an increase of 2.96 per cent from 1999. The Left Front won 35 out of the 42 seats; the Congress – 6 and Trinamul Congress – 1. The Left Front got 50.72 per cent of the votes polled, that is an increase of 3.98 per cent compared to 1999. The Trinamul Congress-BJP alliance vote went down by 8.84 per cent while the Congress share increased by 1.62 per cent.

In the 21 out of the 35 seats won, the Left Front polled 50 per cent or more votes. In 128 out of the 294 Assembly segments, the Left Front polled 60 per cent or more compared to 114 segments in the 2001 Assembly elections.

The Trinamul Congress could retain only one seat, South Kolkata. It lost the other seven sitting seats. The BJP lost both its sitting seats – Dum Dum and Kishnagar. The Congress party which had three seats earlier has won 6 seats this time. It has wrested Darjeeling, Jangipur and Murshidabad from the CPI(M). The loss of the Darjeeling seat is due to the GNLF extending support to the Congress instead of remaining neutral as in the past two elections. The defeat in the Jangipur and Murshidabad sitting seats has to be

noted. Murshidabad is a Muslim majority district. In the panchayat elections, the Left Front had lost the Murshidabad and Malda zilla parishads. According to the state committee's review, minority communalism was active alongwith majority communalism. Both these elements targeted the CPI(M). The loss in the panchayat elections was noted and steps taken to check the weaknesses in the panchayat functioning and the organisation. The defeat in these two seats underlines the necessity for more serious work among the minorities to bring them into the main arena of the class struggle and the democratic movement, while countering the activities of the minority fundamentalists alongwith that of majority communalism.

It should also be noted that both in Malda and Murshidabad districts, there was a combination of the Congress-Trinamul Congress-BJP and a pooling of their votes to defeat our candidates. Such an unprincipled combination and mutual accommodation between the anti-Left parties took place in some other seats also.

One of the features of the West Bengal elections which must be noted is the role played by the Election Commission and, in particular, the Central observers who were sent to the state. The observers acted outside their brief by seeking to intervene in a manner calculated to hamper the CPI(M) and the Left Front's electoral performance. Since this did not concern one or two observers but many, including the special observer, there must have been some direction given by the Commission in this regard.

Further, the induction of polling staff from outside the state also is unprecedented. The argument that this was done in Jammu & Kashmir and Assam earlier cannot be a precedent as there was a special situation prevailing in both the states. The Party will have to take up the matter with the Election Commission, so that in future, there are clear-cut parameters laid down in these matters.

Kerala : The LDF won an unprecedented 18 out of the 20 seats with the CPI(M) winning 12 and one supported independent. For the first time, the Congress could not win a single seat. One seat went to the Muslim League (UDF) and one to P.C. Thomas, independent (NDA). The UDF vote share fell by 8.16 per cent compared to 1999, while the LDF vote went up by 2.88 per cent. The BJP plus NDA vote increased to 12.11 per cent which is a 4.06 per cent increase.

The LDF got more votes than in 1999 Lok Sabha polls in 15 out of the 20 seats. But there was a decline in 5 seats compared to 1999. The BJP did not transfer its votes to the UDF this time.

The main reason for the rout of the UDF was the unpopularity of the Antony government with its anti-working class and anti-people record and the bitter and open infighting amongst the Congress leadership. The sharp drop in the UDF vote share is because of a section of its voters did not come out and vote. The UDF vote has fallen by 14,22,674 while the LDF vote has gone up by only 2,54,860. It is also to be noted that the LDF votes have declined in 70 Assembly segments (half of the total Assembly seats) compared to the 2001 Assembly elections. This further underlines the fact that the victory is mainly due to the decline in the UDF votes because of various factors.

In the Assembly elections in 2001, the UDF had succeeded in uniting all the caste and communal forces under its banner. This time, this combination fell apart and the UDF government policies alienated some of these sections.

The Party and mass organisations had led many class and mass struggles against the Antony government's policies. The two general strikes, the 32-day government employees strike, the struggles of workers of the traditional industries and student struggles – all contributed to the isolation of the Antony government and the UDF.

There was a shift in a section of the Muslim voters towards the CPI(M) and the LDF. The victory of the Party candidate in Manjeri constituency for the first time indicates the shift. The stand taken by the CPI(M) and the Left in fighting the BJP's communal agenda and the consistent anti-imperialist stand taken on Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan has influenced the Muslim community.

The Party will have to take the necessary steps to reach out to the masses who were with the UDF parties and who are alienated from them so that they can be won over to our influence. Further, the fact that the BJP-NDA alliance got 12.11 per cent of the votes is a warning even though this includes the vote received by the independent, P.C. Thomas. The political-ideological fight against the RSS-BJP combine has to be strengthened.

Tripura : The voting percentage in the state has been 69.9, almost the same as the 70 per cent polled in 1999. The CPI(M) and the Left Front has registered a big victory in winning both the Lok Sabha seats with the

highest percentage of votes ever. In West Tripura seat, the CPI(M) candidate polled 70.86 per cent of the vote while in Tripura South (ST), the CPI(M) polled 66.48 per cent of the vote.

There was complete disarray in the opposition, whether it be the Congress or the Trinamul-BJP-INPT alliance. A feature of these elections was that in both the seats, all these parties lost their deposits. The CPI(M) candidates led in all the 60 Assembly segments. In the 20 scheduled tribe seats, the CPI(M) got 70.8 per cent of the vote, while in the 7 scheduled caste seats, it got 71.4 per cent.

The elections were held in a comparatively peaceful atmosphere compared to the earlier elections. During the election campaign period, two extremist groups surrendered while with one of the groups a ceasefire was announced. This contributed to the peaceful atmosphere. The Party was able to campaign in some of the remote tribal areas where earlier it was difficult to go and work. The state committee has adopted certain steps to consolidate the politically and organisationally the new influence gained among the people, including in the tribal areas. This has been done preparatory to the three-tier panchayat elections to be held in July.

Andhra Pradesh : Elections were held to both the Lok Sabha and Assembly in the state. Out of the 42 Lok Sabha seats, the Congress won 29, TDP – 5 TRS – 5, CPI(M) and CPI – 1 each. The TDP-BJP alliance suffered a rout with the BJP not winning any seat. Their alliance saw a decline of 7.85 per cent of vote share compared to 1999.

In the Assembly elections also, the TDP-BJP alliance suffered a big defeat. The Congress won 185 seats, TRS – 26, CPI(M) – 9 and CPI – 6. The TDP got 47 seats and the BJP – 2. The TDP-BJP alliance was rejected by the people in all parts of Andhra Pradesh and not just in the Telangana region. The defeat of the Chandrababu Naidu government is important as it marks the rejection of the World Bank imposed structural adjustment policies embraced by Chandrababu Naidu. These policies caused rural distress and affected the livelihood of all sections of the working people, including dalits and the tribal people. The TDP was rejected both in the rural and urban areas. Women, who were organised under DWACRA, who earlier voted for the TDP voted against them this time in large numbers. Our Party's continuous exposure and struggle against the TDP government's World Bank dictated policies contributed to the isolation and defeat of the TDP.

The CPI(M) won Bhadrachalam (ST) Lok Sabha seat which it contested. In the Assembly, the CPI(M) contested 15 seats, out of which, in 9, there was an adjustment with the Congress. The TRS which had an understanding with the Congress put up candidates in 5 of these seats. Apart from the partial adjustment of 9 seats with the Congress, the Party contested 4 more seats where the Congress too were in the contest. We also put up candidates in 2 seats where the TRS was contesting as they had put up candidates in our seats. In Khammam Assembly seat, which the CPI also claimed, there was no agreement. We won the election defeating the Congress, CPI and TRS. The CPI came fourth in the seat which has been a bone of contention with them for the last three decades.

The TRS got excessively large number of seats in its understanding with the Congress. The TDP-BJP won 9 out of the 11 seats it won in Telangana by defeating TRS candidates. The avoidance of contest with the Congress by the Left has contributed to the defeat of the TDP-BJP combine. The Congress, Left, TRS together polled over 54 per cent of the votes.

The Bhadrachalam seat falls in four districts and it is a scheduled tribe reserved seat. The victory in this seat should help the Party develop in a larger area.

Tamilnadu : The AIADMK-BJP alliance was swept away in a wave which saw all 40 seats (including one seat in Pondicherry) going to the DMK and its allies. The Democratic Progressive Alliance led by the DMK plus the Left have polled 65.06 per cent of the vote while the AIADMK-BJP alliance could get only 34.9 per cent of the vote. The AIADMK alone has got nearly 30 per cent vote.

The policies of the Jayalalitha government with its huge tax burdens on the people and attacks on the rights of all sections, especially government employees and teachers, has been one of the main factors in the defeat of this alliance. Further, the powerful combination represented by the DMK alliance alongwith the Left gave it a strong electoral advantage.

The DMK won 16 seats, Congress – 10, PMK – 5, MDMK – 4, CPI(M) – 2 and CPI – 2. The Party won Madurai, its sitting seat, by polling 56.03 per cent votes and Nagarcoil by a margin of 60.88 per cent votes. In Nagarcoil, the defeat of the BJP is significant as the RSS has a strong base in the area. The Party polled in these two seats 2.87 per cent of the votes. The consistent campaign of our Party on the question of the DMK continuing in the NDA, when issues of differences came up between the DMK and the BJP

contributed to the DMK coming out of the NDA. This helped in creating the right atmosphere for the forging of a wider unity. This victory in Tamilnadu should enable the Party to increase its political intervention and work should be done to consolidate our influence in these two constituencies politically and organisationally.

Maharashtra : The Party contested three seats. Of these, in two seats – Dahanu and Malegaon – we have polled above 1 lakh votes each mainly on our independent strength. In Malegaon, which we contested in 1999 too, increased our vote from 67,000 to 1,13,436 polling 19.2 per cent of the vote. In Dahanu, we have got 1,18,090, which is 17.3 per cent of the vote. In Wardha, a seat which we have won earlier, we could poll only 14,823 vote polling 2.4 per cent. We should not have contested this seat and concentrated only on the other two seats.

Punjab : In Punjab, the Party contested the Hoshiarpur seat which was left for us by the Congress. We have polled 1,85,685 votes. Here, the sitting Congress candidate joined the BSP and contested as its candidate. The BJP won the seat. Our Party did well though it does not have the organisation in all assembly segments of the constituency.

Assam : In Assam, the Party contested two seats – Barpeta and Silchar. The Barpeta seat was won by the Party in 1996 elections, while Silchar was won much earlier in a by-election. In Barpeta, the Party candidate got 48,518 votes and in Silchar, 20,020 votes. The elections were polarised around three major political parties – the Congress, BJP and the AGP who won 9, 2 and 2 seats respectively. These parties sought to divide the people on communal and ethnic grounds. Given the Party's organisational weakness in these two constituencies, it was not possible to emerge as a credible force in the elections in these two seats. The choice of a new candidate, instead of Uddhab Barman in Barpeta, also affected the electoral prospects in this seat.

Bihar : The Party contested the Bhagalpur seat which was our sitting seat. The RJD tried to deprive the Party of the seat. However, we insisted on contesting this seat as a matter of principle. Our candidate polled 2,27,298 votes in Bhagalpur. We lost the election by 1,18,000 votes to the BJP. The BSP candidate, who is a Muslim, got 1,30,000 votes. He succeeded in rallying the bulk of the Muslim vote in the city. The review of the elections has not been completed.

Rajasthan: In Rajasthan, the Party contested two seats – Sikar and Ganganagar (SC). In Sikar, the Party candidate polled 66,241 votes. This is a drop from the 80,000 votes polled in 1999. The Congress candidate succeeded in getting a section of our vote on caste lines. However, he failed to defeat the BJP. In Ganganagar (SC), we contested the seat after more than 20 years. We have polled 22,801 votes.

Uttar Pradesh : In UP, the Party contested 2 seats – Varanasi and Kanpur. The Party has polled a very low vote of 6,379 and 4,558 respectively. In both these seats, the Party had comparatively more work and influence in the past. The erosion of the Party's base is a cause to serious concern. This indicates how the caste appeal and fragmentation has eroded the influence we had in the past. Parties based on caste appeal have made headway. In Kanpur, the main reason for the low vote is the closure of all the mills which has dismantled the working class base. Further, in the polarisation, all the anti-BJP votes went to the Congress and the Muslim votes to the SP candidate.

Other states: The Party contested the Anantnag Lok Sabha seat. Even though the security situation was bad given the concentration of extremist activities in the area, the Polit Bureau advised the Jammu & Kashmir state committee to contest the seat to project our independent position given the fact that the PDP and the National Conference were contesting. The Party polled 18,466 votes which is 12.29 per cent of the total votes polled. Many of the supporters of the Party could not vote given the threat and the lack of security. In Jharkhand, the Party contested the Ranchi seat and got 37,688 votes. In Chattisgarh, we contested the Kanker (ST) seat and got 16,479 votes and in Gujarat, the Dahod (ST) seat, we got 16,299 votes. In Uttaranchal, the Party contested the Garhwal seat for the first time. Even though the expectation was that we would get more votes given the fact that in the entire Lok Sabha seat, we have around 30,000 mass organisation membership, the Party candidate got only 4,360 votes. In Andaman & Nicobar, the Party contested, even though our organisation has weakened in the last few years. The Party candidate polled 4,175 votes.

In the Assembly elections in Karnataka and Orissa, the Party contested 5 and 3 seats respectively. In Karnataka, there was a seat adjustment with Janata Dal (S) in four seats. However, we contested one more seat, when the Janata Dal put up a candidate in a seat allotted to us. We won the Bagepalli seat in Kolar district polling 52 per cent of the vote. This was a seat we won in 1994 and lost in 1999. The next best performance was in Kamlapur seat in Gulbarga district where we got 15,296 votes polling 19.9 percent.

In Orissa, the state committee contested 3 seats in adjustment with the Congress. This included the sitting seat Nilagiri, Bonai (ST) and Boisingha (ST). We won the Bonai seat polling 37,382 defeating the BJP candidate by a margin of around 5700 votes. This is a tribal area where we have some base which can be expanded. However, we lost Nilagiri the sitting seat with a drop of 7 per cent in the vote share. The BJP won the seat. According to the state committee review, the failure to develop mass movements, build the mass organizations and the behaviour of the elected representative contributed to the defeat. In Boisingha, a tribal seat, we got a low vote of 8491 votes. This is one of the areas where we have to concentrate work to expand our tribal base.

6. Review of implementation of electoral-tactical line

The Central Committee had worked out the election tactical line in its meeting held in Hyderabad in January 2004. Before that an emergent CC meeting was held in November in Kolkata to discuss and decide on the election tactics to be adopted in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly election which was being advanced. The CC on the basis of the political-tactical line adopted in the 17th Congress decided that the main task is to defeat the BJP and its allies in the elections. The CC report stated that the BJP has to be defeated because the continuance in power would mean further steps to intimidate the minorities into submission by the hindutva forces and the RSS consolidating itself within the State structure; the rightwing economic policies have caused suffering and increased the burdens on the working people and the pro-American policy has harmed national interests and national sovereignty.

For this, the Party must work to rally the widest democratic and secular forces. The report stated: “We have to rally the secular and democratic parties in the different states, so that the widest forces can be mobilised to defeat the BJP and its allies. While doing so, we cannot have any alliance or joint platform with the Congress. We must expose the harmful economic policies of the Congress. We should mobilise the people on our political platform so that we are able to increase the influence and strength of the Left.”

While campaigning against the BJP alliance, the report stated: “In doing so, we must be able to set out the alternative policies that the CPI(M) and the Left represents. This will require an independent campaign along with joint platform and united campaign that we may conduct.”

The Party has by and large been able to mount such a campaign focusing on the harmful effects of BJP rule and its policies while popularising the stand of the CPI(M) and the Left. This along with the role played by the Party in opposing the communal forces and defending the economic interests of the working people, helped in increasing the political prestige of the Party and the Left. In West Bengal and Tripura, the record of the Left Front government also contributed to the popular support that we received.

The success of the electoral line was also due to the correct approach adopted by the CC in its January meeting of working out specific tactics state-wise. “We have to see the situation in each state and the political forces operating there and work out election tactics which should help to target the BJP and its allies and forge an understanding with the non-Congress secular parties. We should see that the division of that anti-BJP votes is minimized to best extent possible.”

It is this exercise state-wise, of forging an understanding with the DMK-led alliance in Tamilnadu, with the avoidance of mutual contest as far as possible amongst the parties opposed to the TDP-BJP alliance in Andhra, the understanding with RJD, with the non-Congress parties in Maharashtra and the Janata Dal (S) in Karnataka, that we went in for the election battle.

In states where the contest was directly between the BJP and the Congress, we fought one or two seats and in the rest conducted a general campaign for the defeat of the BJP. In some of these states, we called upon the people to vote for the Congress as the strongest opposition to defeat the BJP.

In Andhra Pradesh, in the November CC meeting it was decided to draw up a list of our seats and announce them with an appeal to the secular opposition parties not to put up candidates in our seats and in turn we would extend support to those candidates who can defeat the TDP-BJP alliance. After the January CC meeting, the process of finalizing the seats led to talks with the Congress leadership both in Andhra Pradesh and the national level for a seat adjustment. Finally seat adjustment in 9 seats was worked out and contest in four others with the Congress. For the Lok Sabha, we contested only one seat in adjustment with the Congress; the CPI also contested one seat.

In Orissa, we did not contest any Lok Sabha seat and we contested for the Assembly in three seats with an adjustment with the Congress. The CPI also

had adjustment in five seats with the Congress. In these constituencies, we had joint meetings apart from our own campaign.

In Punjab, we contested the Hoshiarpur seat. The Congress supported our candidate and joint meetings and campaign was organized. In both Orissa and Punjab, there were seat adjustments with the Congress and joint campaign. This gave the impression that there was a state-wide understanding with the Congress which was not envisaged in the approach decided by the CC.

In Tamilnadu, where the Party had an understanding with the DMK, it also had a wider alliance with parties like the Congress, PMK, MDMK, Muslim League and CPI. Given the past experience of the pattern of electioneering in Tamilnadu where all parties constitute themselves into a front or alliance, it was decided that along with the joint campaign, the Party should organize on its own platform election meetings. According to the Tamilnadu PC over a 1000 public and street corner meetings were held under our auspices. But most public meetings organized by us became joint in character with all the leaders of the DPA speaking at these meetings while the main speaker was ours. Though to some extent it helped to project our independent line, the joint platform character of the meeting acted as a constraint.

In many of the weaker states, apart from contesting the one or two seats, we have failed to conduct an independent campaign in the rest of the state to take our political message to the people. Only some states like Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh has done so all over the state. In some other states it was done in a few areas. In the absence of such a campaign, there are reports that even some Party members in some areas did not go by the Party line in supporting candidates of other parties. The state committees must ensure that in future, independent campaign takes place in the state outside the seats where we are contesting.

7. Left Unity

In these elections, there was greater unity between the Left parties, particularly the CPI(M) and the CPI. Except in Shahdol seat in Madhya Pradesh and in the Khamam assembly seat in Andhra Pradesh, there were no clashes in the seats contested. However, in a few places like some seats in Andhra Pradesh, Silchar in Assam, Kanker in Chattisgarh and Garhwal in Uttaranchal, the CPI do not work for our candidates.

8. Achievements And Problems

The Party has achieved great electoral success in the three strong states of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. In both West Bengal and Tripura, where there are Left Front governments, the striking fact, unlike in other states where bourgeois governments exist, is that we are able to win successive elections with popular support. Being in state governments with overall limitations does create discontent among different sections. But the “anti-incumbency” factors have been overcome. This is because of the success in land reforms, progress achieved in the rural areas through government policies and the working of the panchayat system. In West Bengal, for instance, unlike the spectacle of suicides of farmers in other states, the farmers got reasonable price for the kharif crop and the potato crop. Further, the Party has constantly told the people the limitations under which the state government works and can do what is feasible. It is these basic factors which enabled the Left-led governments to retain the confidence of the people.

While appreciating the achievement of the Party in getting 44 seats, the highest number ever in a Parliament election, it needs to be remembered that the bulk of these seats – 41 out of 44 – has come from the three states of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. It is a sobering fact that even now, as pointed out in the 17th Party Congress Political-Organisational Report, we are not in a position to win a Lok Sabha constituency with our independent strength outside these three states. If we exclude Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh, where we had an understanding with a strong electoral combination, there is no improvement in the Party’s voting pattern in the rest of India, except to some extent in Maharashtra. In fact, our electoral performance in terms of votes, or, the percentage polled has declined in Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Hindi-speaking region in general. In Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, Karnataka and Orissa, we did not put up any candidates. This pinpoints our inability to make political headway and the organisational weaknesses in many states.

In the struggle against the communal forces, our Party has played a consistent role. The electoral verdict has shown that both in the rural areas where farmers and the rural poor were in distress and the working class who had suffered a big assault on their livelihood and rights have come out and voted against the BJP alliance. Even though we have been conducting various struggles on these issues, we have not been able to expand our

political influence which would have reflected in the electoral performance in the weaker states. To put it in another way, the election results have confirmed that there was a gathering discontent amongst different sections of working people affected by the policies of the BJP-led government and its allies in the states. But we have not been able to benefit from this discontent despite our various campaigns and activities.

In these states, we have not been able to project ourselves as an independent political force. Though this weakness has been noted in earlier reviews too, we must examine how we are intervening in political issues and how we are conducting political campaigns among the people taking into account the specific situation in each state. We have to also examine the work being done in the trade union, kisan and agricultural workers movements which should be the basis for our advance. The CC has adopted task documents for the trade union and the kisan- agricultural workers fronts. We must stress on concretisation of these tasks statewise and their implementation. We have to take steps to overcome the organisational weaknesses, which have been identified in earlier reviews, and strengthen the Party. The rectification document has to be taken up for implementation. Work of the mass organisations and Party building within them must be given greater attention.

One of the problems facing the Party and the democratic movement in this connection has been sharply focussed once again in these elections. That is the continuing, and in some places, the intensification of the caste appeal and fragmentation of the political forces on caste lines. Caste based parties or the appeal of caste leaders in parties have succeeded in wooing away sections of people who should have been mobilised by us. In the election reviews from the 1996 Lok Sabha elections onwards, we have been pointing out this feature. In the 1999 election review, we had noted that this growing caste appeal and fragmentation is not confined to the Hindi states alone but it has spread to other states too. It was pointed out that one of the ways to tackle the problem is for the Party to take up the question of caste and social oppression alongwith the economic and day-to-day issues of livelihood of the oppressed sections. Even today, there is hardly any general campaign against caste oppression, or, the disruptive role of the caste divisions. It has become all the more important for the Party to work out concrete tactics in the respective areas taking into account the caste and class configurations.

These general elections have also highlighted the enormous use of money power. In Andhra Pradesh, it has been reported that rupees one to two crore were spent on an average in every Assembly constituency by the candidates

of the main bourgeois parties. For the Lok Sabha, the amount was three times more this figure. While Andhra Pradesh was the most glaring example, the use of money is growing rapidly in other states too. Unless there are basic electoral reforms and stricter checks on money power, the problem cannot be tackled. Among the basic reforms required is proportional representation with the partial list system. It obviates the dependence on powerful individual candidates for winning elections.

Many of the state reports show that a large number of women activists were mobilised for the election campaign. Women squads conducted door to door campaign in many constituencies. Attention should be paid to recruit such women activists into the Party. The participation of women in election meetings organised by the Party was also high. This is a positive sign.

In the tribal areas we have noted the systematic work being done by the RSS and its outfits to expand their influence. The Central Committee has discussed our work in the tribal areas and adopted a policy document. In the states with substantial tribal population, we must plan our work in the tribal areas. In the weakest states where the Party had done some work, or, has some presence in the tribal areas, we have, in electoral terms, got more votes than in other areas as seen in the Chattisgarh and Gujarat ST reserved seats we contested.

9. Party Centre's Work

For the election campaign, the agit-prop sub-committee decided to bring out 12 folders on the following subjects: 1) Under BJP rule: Rural India in crisis, 2) The BJP-led government: A threat to national unity, 3) India does not shine for dalits, 4) Education is not for all, 5) No jobs for millions, 6) A shameless pro-American foreign policy, 7) Health is not for all, 8) Which India is shining? 9) Infrastructure in ruins, 10) Scams and Scandals Galore! 11) Why women are suffering, 12) Starving India.

These folders were printed in English and also sent to the states for use. Out of these, nine were also printed in Hindi for distribution in the constituencies in the Hindi-speaking states. The Party Centre provided 45,000 folders in Hindi to 10 such constituencies.

The Party Centre helped the Hindi states with badges, posters and chain flags. West Bengal and Kerala contributed finances for the Central Party election fund. Further, Kerala provided material help to the Nagarcoil

constituency in Tamilnadu. West Bengal helped Bihar, Tripura, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Orissa with materials like posters, chain flags etc.

In order to project the Party's understanding and independent line during the election campaign, a series of press conferences were held by the Party Centre on 15 topics such as unemployment, food security, exposing the 'Shining India' campaign, our stand on power, telecom, education, health, Centre-state relations and so on. Notes were prepared which were circulated to the media. This was first time over ten press conferences were held and this helped to propagate our Party's views on these subjects to a wider audience. A booklet of all the notes exposing the 'Shining India' campaign was published.

Among the PB members from the Centre, Surjeet went to Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Kerala, Rajasthan and Punjab. Sitaram Yechury participated in the campaign in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Tamilnadu, Rajasthan, Orissa, Assam, Kerala, Jharkhand and West Bengal. Prakash Karat went to Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tripura, Tamilnadu, Kerala and Orissa for the campaign. S. Ramachandran Pillai was in Kerala for the election period and also went to Karnataka. E. Balanandan was in Kerala for the campaign. M.K. Pandhe went to Chattisgarh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharya went to Maharashtra for three meetings apart from the campaign in West Bengal. Biman Basu went to Orissa for election meetings. Manik Sarkar went to Kerala, West Bengal and Tamilnadu apart from Tripura.

Among the CC members from the Centre, Brinda Karat went to West Bengal and Uttaranchal and Suneet Chopra to UP and Andhra Pradesh. W.R Varadha Rajan and K. Varadharajan were based in Tamilnadu. Surjyokanta Mishra went to Orissa.

A number of West Bengal state secretariat members, PCMs, MPs and other leaders participated in the campaign in Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Assam, Andaman & Nicobar and Orissa.

Conclusion: Immediate Tasks

1. The defeat of the BJP alliance and the dislodging of the Vajpayee government after six years is a big achievement. Our Party adopted correct electoral tactics which contributed to the isolation and defeat of the BJP and its allies. Our Party has also won the highest number

- of seats in the Parliament election. Though there is no change in the correlation of class forces, a favourable situation has been created which, if skillfully utilised, can help to advance the interests of the Left and democratic forces.
2. We must be able to step up our independent political intervention. We must be vigilant to counter the BJP-RSS combine's manoeuvres. We must work for pushing the UPA government to implement the pro-people measures in the Common Minimum Programme while opposing the policies which continue the neo-liberal framework.
 3. The analysis of the election results show that except in the three strong states and to a certain extent in Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu, the Party's political-organisational position has not improved. In the above states some advances are there. Among the weaker states, except in Maharashtra, the electoral performance has not shown any improvement. The reports from the state committees show continuing organisational problems and weaknesses and lack of progress in political intervention.
 4. The PB/CC will have to take steps to intervene in the states where organizational problems exist and to see that the political-organisational decisions taken are implemented. This must be done with specific reference to the five priority states.
 5. The states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa must identify selected tribal areas to draw up our plans for concentrated work in consultation with the PB.

Annexure 1

Performance of Allies

Congress + Allies

Parties	Seats	Votes (%)
Congress	145	26.69
RJD	21	2.22
DMK	16	1.82
NCP	9	1.78
PMK	6	0.56
JMM	5	0.48
TRS	5	0.63
LJNP	4	0.72
MDMK	4	0.43
PDP	1	0.08
MUL	1	0.2
RPI (A)	1	0.09
IND (INC)	1	0.02
Total	219	35.82

BJP + Allies

Parties	Seats	Votes (%)
BJP	138	22.16
Shiv Sena	12	1.82
BJD	11	1.31
JD(U)	8	2.29
Akali Dal (Badal)	8	0.91
TDP	5	3.06
WBTC	2	2.08
MNF	1	0.05
SDF	1	0.04
IFDP	1	0.07
NPF	1	0.18
IND (BJP)	1	0.18
Total	189	35.91

Left Front

Parties	Seats	Votes (%)
CPI(M)	43	5.69
CPI	10	1.4
RSP	3	0.44
FBL	3	0.35
KEC	1	0.09
IND (LF)	1	0.08
Total	61	8.34

Others

Parties	Seats	Votes (%)
SP	36	4.33
BSP	19	5.33
RLD	3	0.64
JD(S)	3	1.48
AGP	2	0.53
SJP(R)	1	0.09
N.Conference	2	0.13
Other Independents	1	3.79
NLP	1	0.09
MIM	1	0.11
Others	1	5.56
Total	70	19.93

**Performance of National Parties :
Comparison to 1999**

Name of Party	1999			2004		
	Contested	Won	% of votes	Contested	Won	% of votes
BJP	339	182	23.75%	364	138	22.16%
BSP	225	14	4.16%	435	19	5.33%
CPI	54	4	1.48%	34	10	1.4%
CPI(M)	72	33	5.40%	69	44	5.69%
Congress	453	114	28.30%	417	145	26.69%
NCP				32	9	1.78%