

Indian ruling classes are undertaking this task with the blessings of the US imperialists, who have matching interests, but have their hands full with imperialist adventures elsewhere. The communist revolutionary forces of India must oppose this brazen policy and stay the hand of their ruling classes. This is part of their proletarian internationalist duty to the struggling masses of Nepal, as well as part of their struggle against their own autocratic ruling classes.

September 30, 2009.

Communiqué

The 15th Lok Sabha Elections and the Post-Election Situation

The ruling classes look to parliamentary elections to provide some stamp of legitimacy periodically to their anti-people rule, and to achieve a stable government in order to accelerate the onslaught of their anti-people policies in the period until the next election. For all their hopes and efforts, all that the parliamentary polls have delivered to them over recent decades is a stream of fractured verdicts and rickety governments. And so the ruling classes clutch at and project any evidence of improvement in this state of affairs. They have thus greeted the results of the elections to the 15th Lok Sabha with a huge sigh of relief.

While it is true that the improved showing of the Congress party in the 2009 elections has rendered the present United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government somewhat less vulnerable in Parliament than its immediate UPA predecessor, ruling class commentators have gone further and made extravagant political claims. Among these claims are (i) that the Congress has obtained a clear 'mandate'; (ii) that this foremost party of the Indian ruling classes has effected a historic reversal of its long-term decline, and is now on the path of resurgence; (iii) that 'all-India' or 'national' parties have returned to centrestage, whereas regional and 'caste-based' parties have suffered a setback; and (iv) that the so-called 'anti-incumbency' factor, i.e. negative voting against the party in power, has dissipated, and is being replaced with positive voting for 'good governance'. The purpose of such propaganda is to impress upon the struggling masses the supposed vitality of the parliamentary system, confuse them, and demoralise their struggles

against this system, and thus assist the onslaught against the people. Let us look at the various claims briefly.

Far-fetched claim to 'mandate'

The claim about the Congress having obtained a 'mandate', even in the language of conventional parliamentary politics, is far-fetched. While the Congress did gain an impressive 61 seats more than in the last election, its *vote-share* grew by only a little over 2 per cent over 2004: At less than 29 per cent, its vote-share was roughly the same as in 1996 or 1999, and seven percentage points below the figure for 1991. For the Congress to return to its heyday, when it used to obtain vote-shares of over 40 per cent, is an even farther cry. Even the combined vote-share of the UPA – at 36 per cent – cannot claim to constitute much of a 'mandate'. The most trumpeted gain for the Congress was its improved performance in U.P., where its vote-share rose 10 percentage points, and a section of the Muslims, and even some Dalits, returned to its fold. However, even after this gain the Congress vote-share in U.P. was just 18 per cent, third place behind the BSP and Samajwadi Party (and fourth place if we take the BJP-RLD alliance as a single block).

As for the claims of a return to centre-stage of the 'national' parties, the combined vote-share of the Congress and the BJP actually fell by over one per cent, as did the vote-share of the revisionists (the CPI and CPI-M), by half a percentage point. On the other hand the combined share of the so-called 'regional' parties* and independents rose from 44 per cent to 46 per cent. That is, the ruling class's problem of the lack of all-India parties persists, and with it the general condition of instability.

In fact, the elation with which the ruling classes as a whole greeted the Congress performance is an indication of how low their expectations were before results were declared. For not only was the improved Congress performance far short of a majority; even with its pre-poll allies it was 10 seats short of a majority. Yet merely its having got within the general vicinity of the target is an occasion for celebration and for making extravagant claims.

In terms of participation, the elections to the 15th Lok Sabha were no

* We are using the term 'regional' party here as it is used in the establishment media, that is, a party whose influence is more or less limited to a single state. The figure includes non-Congress, non-BJP, non-Left parties which are part of the UPA, NDA, Third Front, and Left Front.

different from the last several elections: in the percentage of turnout (roughly 60 per cent); in the lifelessness of the campaign; or in the indifference of the voters. The hapless voters, those alleged 'sovereigns' of Indian 'democracy', continued by and large to vote, if only because they saw no particular purpose in discarding this meagre claim as well with nothing in its place.*

Negative vote continued to operate

The negative vote against the ruling party (the 'anti-incumbency factor') did in fact continue to operate in the recent elections, as can be seen in several results. In U.P., the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) set itself an ambitious target of winning nearly 50 seats, as a launch pad for the prime ministerial ambitions of its suprema Mayawati; had it obtained the same votes that won it an outright majority in the 2007 U.P. state assembly elections, it might not have fallen far short of its target. However, after two years' of BSP rule in U.P., the BSP's vote-share in these parliamentary elections dropped significantly from the 2007 figure, and it had to satisfy itself with just 20 seats. In Rajasthan, the Congress continued to benefit from, among other factors, the negative vote against the earlier ruling BJP, which had brought the Congress to power in the state just a few months earlier. In Uttarakhand, where the BJP has won the majority of seats since 1991 and is in power at the state level, the Congress made a clean sweep of the parliamentary seats.

Nor did the state-level negative vote benefit only the Congress: in Jharkhand, which has been under administrative entities controlled or supported by the Congress and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha since September 2006, the BJP won 8 of the 14 seats. Indeed, so thoroughly has the 'anti-incumbency factor' been accepted as a fact of life in ruling class politics

* However, significant instances of boycott occurred in certain regions where a section of the masses consciously asserted some form of alternative to the existing State power. Two noteworthy instances: first, the boycott in the Kashmir valley, with turnout percentages of around 25 per cent recorded in Anantnag and Srinagar, deflating the propaganda that the higher turnout in the assembly elections last year constituted an endorsement of Indian occupation; and second, the boycott in parts of the tribal areas of Purulia, Bankura and West Midnapore, marked by strong sympathy for the tribal upsurge in Lalgarh. Notably, the Election Commission had to negotiate with the People's Committee against Police Atrocities in order to hold the polls in Lalgarh region.

The Punjab chief minister said that, by winning five of the 13 Lok Sabha seats from the state, the Akali-BJP alliance was "better placed" than the earlier Congress government, which had won just two seats in 2004 when it had been in power in the state.

In some states, such as Maharashtra and A.P., a division in the opposition with the emergence of new parties (the Maharashtra Navnirman Front and the Praja Rajyam, respectively, in the two states) helped the ruling party maintain its position. In other states, such as Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, the ruling party saw some reduction in its support, without losing much in total seats. The Gujarat chief minister, Narendra Modi, had been predicting that the BJP would win 22 of the state's 26 seats, and the Congress was in a ramshackle state, without a strong leader. Nevertheless, the Congress won 11 seats, reversing some of its losses in the previous assemblies, and forcing Modi to postpone his prime ministerial ambitions.

While a number of other factors contributed to defeat of the Left and Democratic Front in Kerala, it is West Bengal that offers the most striking evidence of the continuing strength of the negative vote phenomenon. The CPI(M), which has ruled the state continuously since 1977, was fond of claiming that it had rendered the 'anti-incumbency factor' irrelevant. In fact, however, the alienation of the people from the CPI(M) overlords was intensifying continuously over the years, bubbling underground; still, that anti-incumbency factor had lacked any effective channel in parliamentary elections because of the opposition's notoriety, juvenile behaviour, and failure to unite. Although the developments in Nandigram and Singur played a major role in the resounding verdict against the Left Front in 2009, that verdict cannot be attributed solely to them, or to other recent developments that had estranged the Muslim community. Rather, it was the result of the accumulated popular wrath of years at last finding an effective channel in the Janamool-Congress alliance.

As mentioned in *Comrade* issue no. 22 (January 2005), people by mere strength of their vote-power cannot even get rid of a hated government and replace it with another ruling class government. They cannot on their own create the condition within the system required for change of government through votes. That required condition is the availability of an opposition or alliance of parties which may provide a parliamentary political alternative to the ruling party. Thus even a government such as that of

Naveen Patnaik, which has presided for years over the abysmal neglect of the rural people of Orissa and has in recent years rained down severe repression on them at Kalinganagar, POSCO, Lanjigarh, Kashipur, and other places, sailed along smoothly without a threat because the local Congress is so disreputable and feeble. He has even been able to dump his erstwhile allies the BJP, knowing that they cannot tie up with the Congress against him. Similarly, it is the weakening and division of the opposition in Bihar, combined with the skillful development of caste constituencies by the ruling JD(U) under Nitish Kumar, that explains the result there, rather than any miracle of 'good governance'. In Tamil Nadu, among the factors that played a role in the results was the holocaust in Sri Lanka and the strong sympathy among the Tamil Nadu masses for the national struggle there. The ruling DMK, despite its alliance with the Congress, was able to project itself as a friend of the LTTE, not only because this has been its longstanding posture, but also because of Jayalalitha's known enmity with the LTTE. Recognising this danger, Jayalalitha, long a sworn opponent of a separate Tamil Eelam (homeland), suddenly declared that "Only a separate Eelam would provide a lasting solution to the Tamils in Sri Lanka.... If AIADMK is elected we will get the new government formed with our support to establish this separate Eelam." Nevertheless, this last-minute somersault would have carried little credibility with the voters.

Even as the negative vote continued to operate, we should take note of a complicating factor; namely, that the people may hesitate to punish a government for their economic hardship if, to do so, they have to vote for an opposition which itself has a recent record of aggressive implementation of 'reforms' in the same state. For example, even five years was a short period for people to forget the record of the Jayalalitha and Chandrababu Naidu governments in hiking the price of power to agriculture, in excluding large sections of the rural poor from cheap rations, and in brutally repressing the protest against such measures. By contrast, the governments that replaced them immediately provided free power to agriculture and cheap rations. Such was the meagre content of the so-called 'good governance' by the ruling parties in these states.

The very fact that both ruling and opposition parties in various states promised cheap rice and relief employment, and that a large section of voters decided whom to support on this basis, is a stark exposure of the real

condition of the broad masses. In fact their condition is so dire that they find it difficult to purchase enough cereals to fill their stomachs, let alone meet their other requirements. The fact that, in these abject conditions, they might vote for one or the other candidate in the hope of getting (or continuing to get) rice, or a couple of months' work in a year, reflects their desperation, not any vitality of parliamentary democracy.

Drought of charismatic national leaders persists for the ruling classes

As part of their effort to maintain people's faith in the bankrupt parliamentary system in India's semi-feudal society, the ruling classes have always projected one or the other bourgeois political leader as a charismatic and great national leader, to give a government led by him the stamp of popular legitimacy (see *Comrade*, issue no. 8). This task could never have been more strenuous: parliamentary politics is bringing the most lifeless mediocrities to the fore, as a glance at the two largest parties reveals. It is widely known that Manmohan Singh enjoys no power of his own, and has been installed as prime minister precisely because he is weak, unimposing, and can pose no threat to the Gandhi family's hold on power; this more or less rules out any effort to build up an aura of great leadership around him.* However, the BJP is no better off than the Congress. Slim as the basis was for making out Vajpayee to be a great leader, it is near-impossible

* The following is a representative sample:

Interviewer: Tell us a bit about the moment you found out you would be PM.

Manmohan: Mrs Sonia Gandhi told me 48 hours before. I tried to resist, to argue that she was the best person to unify the party. I told her I had my limitations, that I have no mass following, but she said she had looked around and I would have to undertake the responsibility. The faith she reposed in me added to the burden of the office I was going to assume.

Interviewer: Looking into the future, if you are re-elected PM, will you like to finish the entire term or will you, maybe mid-term, think about handing it over to someone else, obviously everyone would think Rahul Gandhi?

Manmohan: I have said Rahul Gandhi has all the qualities a good PM should have. I certainly at some stage would like the seat of power to be in the hands of people younger than I am." – CNN-IBN interview, May 2, 2009.

Since his induction into parliamentary politics in 1991, Manmohan Singh has never fought a direct election, but has remained a Rajya Sabha member; he cannot be trusted to win even a 'safe' Lok Sabha seat. Indeed, the previous Lok Sabha was barred from challenging him on a point of privilege because he was not a member of that body.

to generate charisma from the personality of L.K. Advani. Thus each side had less success in projecting the leadership qualities of its own prime ministerial candidate than in portraying the opposite side's candidate as "weak".

Efforts have been on for the past few years to build the image of Rahul Gandhi as the saviour of the Congress, regardless of his shallowness, immaturity and ill-ease among the masses. In particular, he is deliberately projected as providing the 'human face' to the Government's economic policies. The farm loan write-off was made out to be his brainwave; the extension of NREGA throughout the country was said to be carried out on his suggestion; and his laboured meals in the houses of Dalits and other rural poor are given wide publicity. Even the Congress's decision to contest the elections in U.P. and Bihar on its own is now attributed to the sagacity of young Rahul, obliterating the fact that the Congress was compelled to go it alone solely because of the intransigence of its allies in those states. (How little faith the Congress leadership actually had in Rahul's alleged charisma was made clear when he had to be elaborately protected from being overshadowed by his sister, a more natural campaigner.)

In these elections, several others tried their hands at projecting themselves as charismatic national leaders – Narendra Modi, Jayalalitha, Sharad Pawar and Mayawati. All faced setbacks. The drought of charismatic figures continues for the ruling classes.

Voters disregard hypocritical campaigns re. foreign monies, nuclear deal

The condition of the Indian economy as such was not made into an important issue in the elections. However, two issues raised during the election campaign are worth noting for the fact that they touched on important anti-imperialist demands, but in a distorted way. First, the BJP made a last-minute, half-hearted attempt to project the issue of illicit flows of Indian monies to foreign tax havens. It pointed to a study which estimated the sum of these flows at a staggering \$137.5 billion for the period 2002-06. Of course, the BJP ignored the fact that such flows are an integral part of imperialist exploitation, and that only an anti-imperialist revolution can stop them; rather, it projected them as if some "action" by the Indian government could stop these flows and recover the sums stashed abroad. However, the issue proved a damp squib among different classes of voters. Among politically knowledgeable sections, the BJP's late awakening to this issue was hardly convincing: Indeed, the BJP was in power for two (2002-

04) of the years covered by the study. As for the broad masses, they find it difficult to relate to such questions. The masses can acquire anti-imperialist consciousness in the context of, and in the course of, their concrete struggles. Without such a link, such an issue, although objectively arising from the imperialist subjugation of India, merely appears to them to be one more issue of 'corruption', and they quite rightly view *all* the parliamentary parties as corrupt.

The same absence of a link explains why the masses paid no attention to the CPI(M)'s claim that it was fighting imperialism by opposing the Indo-US nuclear deal. The masses had direct experience of the CPI(M)'s policy of soliciting foreign investment and promoting predatory comprador development; this fact carried far more weight with them than the CPI(M)'s claim to be fighting US overlordship in the sphere of foreign policy. Of course, the CPI(M)'s real electoral consideration in highlighting the nuclear deal was its hope of winning back some Muslim votes; but in this, too, they were disappointed.

Implications of contention for the Dalit vote

A sharpened tussle is on between different parties, particularly the Congress and the BSP, for the Dalit vote in north India. BSP rule in U.P., especially in the latest stint when the BSP has enjoyed a majority on its own, has provided enough experience for the Dalits to form a judgement about that party. Exploitation and social oppression of the Dalits (exemplified by a string of caste atrocities) continue unabated. At the same time, the BSP's soaring parliamentary ambitions have compelled it in the recent past to shift its focus away from Dalits, project the demand for reservation for the upper castes, and seek the votes of other communities by similar casteist means. In fact, it has even relegated Dalits to a minority among its parliamentary candidates, along the lines of other parties.* All this has rendered the BSP vulnerable to the Congress attack on the BSP's original and essential Dalit base.

In the wake of the recent elections, therefore, Mayawati has moved to

* Of the BSP's 80 candidates, 29 were from upper castes – 20 Brahmmins, six Thakurs, two banias and one Punjabi Khatri. Muslims were allotted 14 constituencies, Other Backward Classes 20. Dalits were only fielded in 17 reserved constituencies.

shore up the BSP's Dalit flank. She has publicly demoted her upper-caste second-in-command, S.C. Mishra, architect of the "sarvajan samaj" strategy of wooing upper-caste votes which won her success in the 2007 assembly elections. On May 26, she passed orders that henceforth top police officers – the Director General of Police, Superintendent of Police and SSP of the area – would visit the site of atrocities on Dalits on the day of the incident itself; the DGP would report to her on the same day. The media would be informed immediately of the action taken. Further, all pending cases related to land deeds (pattas) of Dalits would be disposed of by July 15, and action would be taken against officials if cases were kept pending.

The departure of a large section of Dalits from the Congress vote bank in the 1990s was an important element in the decline of that party. It also objectively indicated a stirring among this most exploited, oppressed and potentially revolutionary section. The current tussle for the Dalit vote will only heighten the negative exposure of the parliamentary parties among the Dalits. It will thus provide a further opening for the revolutionary forces, even as they emerge as the true champions of the struggle against social oppression and injustice; to explain how caste-based politics leads the socially oppressed sections to a dead-end. It would make the Dalits more receptive to revolutionary politics.

Slide of the BJP

While the ruling classes were satisfied with the improved performance of the Congress, and with the poor performance of the 'Third' and 'Fourth' fronts, the poor performance of the BJP creates a problem for them. For the ruling classes broadly would like to see the emergence of a *de facto* two-party system, with two identical all-India parties, either of which would be capable of ruling on its own. This would ensure stability of governments and absolute continuity of policies, even while retaining the safety valve of allowing people to remove the party in power and replacing it with an 'alternative'. However, the BJP's decline in the latest elections further undermines the second pole of such a system (in fact, the results were less marked by the rise of the Congress than by the decline of the BJP). The absence of a clear second pole would lead to uncertainty when the Congress faces popular discontent once again.

The BJP's sudden decline, after its precipitous rise in the early 1990s

and its capture of power by the end of that decade, is an expression of the same crisis of ruling class politics as the long-term decline of the Congress: the contradictory pulls of meeting the increasingly aggressive demands of its social base (the ruling class sections it actually serves) and pleasing its support base (its section of voters). Having found by the mid-1990s that its Hindutva chauvinist support base was too narrow to bring it to power, the BJP accepted earlier than did the Congress the need to build alliances with all and sundry in this era of fractured ruling class politics; this is what helped it finally ascend to the throne. But the BJP soon fell from power in the 2004 elections under the weight of its own anti-people economic policies. At the same time, its anti-minority campaigns and pogroms had created difficulties for its alliance partners. (Even its continuing ally in Bihar, Nitish Kumar, tries to distance himself from its Hindutva communal stance.) The absence of a BJP leader who can pose as a broader national leader, and thus provide some cover for the other parties in the NDA (as Vajpayee could), is sharply felt by the parties in the NDA.

Once the Congress accepted the compulsion of junior partnership in state-level alliances, a party like Trinamool, which could ill afford to ignore Muslim votes, could shift from the NDA to the UPA. But even other parties, which were pitted against the Congress at the state level and hence could not tie up with it nationally, found it better eventually to snap ties with the BJP: for example, the Telugu Desam (which had been providing outside support), the National Conference, and the Biju Janata Dal. Despite the fact that the DMK, PMK, and MDMK left the NDA, Jayalalitha's AIADMK did not join it. By comparison, the BJP's gains of allies in recent years have been trivial.

However, the BJP's main shortcoming is that it lacks any rallying slogan. Under the growing pressure of the masses' harsher economic conditions, it has become more difficult to rally them for purely diversionary and sectarian demands such as the Ram temple (even the recent revival of the BJP's anti-Christian campaign yielded at best limited, local gains). At the same time, under the pressure of serving its social base, the BJP is unable to take advantage of the UPA government's vulnerable points: for example, it is unable to put up any opposition to the UPA's subservience to US imperialism, since its own contention is that it would better serve US imperialism; it is also unable to champion the cause of those devastated by various

forms of predatory 'development' projects, since it is itself promoting such projects with gusto. As for cosmetic welfare measures, the Congress has considerably outdone the previous NDA government in this respect, leaving the BJP with little to say.

There are sharp divisions within the BJP on how to overcome its present crisis, with powerful interests pressing for a thorough re-make. In this situation, the party leadership is unable to exercise any discipline on its warring factions. The BJP's once carefully cultivated image of a 'clean' and disciplined party was shattered comprehensively during the NDA's stint in office at the Centre, and now the tussles between various corrupting comprador interests are accelerating the degeneration of the BJP. Thus its leader L.K. Advani recently was forced to warn party MPs that "they should stay away from corporate wars and not become unwitting pawns and lobbyists for business houses." The BJP deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, Ms Sushma Swaraj, warned the MPs not to agree to ask questions at the instance of one corporate house or the other. (*The Hindu*, July 8, 2009)

Congress preparing for a much more ruthless onslaught

No doubt the Congress has for the moment managed, in part through its own conscious moves and in part through the deteriorating condition of its opponents, to avoid the fate of the NDA in the 2004 elections. However, it did not *essentially* draw lessons from the NDA's 2004 defeat. Rather, the UPA government outdid the NDA government in the unashamed, ruthless and single-minded pursuit of the comprador model of economic growth under imperialism's banner of globalisation-liberalisation-privatisation, in utter disregard of the capacity of the productive masses of Indian people for bearing its burden. In tune with this, in the face of prevalent economic deprivation and social dislocation of large masses of the Indian people, the Congress came out with a triumphalist signature-tune for its election campaign, "Jai Ho!", echoing the "India Shining" slogan of the NDA's 2004 election campaign.

Still, it showed better sense than its predecessor of the need to mitigate the anti-incumbency factor, and undertook some token measures to that end. Taking note of the explosive potential of rural discontent and suffering, it initiated some rural welfare programmes (NREGA, Bharat Nirman, debt write-off) in such a fashion that they peaked in the run-up to the elections.

Another significant step of this kind worth mentioning was the passage of the Scheduled Tribes Act (ostensibly recognising the tribals' right to forest land).

However, the reason for this reluctant allowance for some populist measures was the fear of a militant response from the masses to the *main* thrust of its economic policy – predatory liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation – by making out that adequate 'safety nets' are in place, and that the policy has a 'human face'. Moreover, as can be seen from a glance at the actual allocations made, this populism is skin-deep. The most widely trumpeted scheme, the NREGA, to which liberal commentators attribute the victory of the Congress, involves expenditures of a little over half a percentage point of GDP. It will make little material difference to the lives of the people, though it may strengthen somewhat the manipulative capacity of the ruling classes in the short run.

This manipulative capacity is strengthened not mainly by the material aspect of these measures, but by their *political* aspect. We need to take note of how the ruling classes are attempting, through these schemes and legislations, to penetrate into different layers of the rural masses, including the tribals and oppressed castes, and to set up their own networks among them.

It follows that wherever such measures actually have an impact on the consciousness of the masses, revolutionary forces need to raise concrete struggle-demands for the proper implementation of these measures, and conduct the struggles in such a way as would strengthen the democratic authority of the masses rather than make them dependent on the bureaucratic-feudal combine. They must make the masses aware that such measures too are a response to mass discontent, upsurges, and resistance-struggles, and indicate the enhanced scope for accelerating people's organised struggles on their burning and *fundamental* demands. In particular, they must show how these paltry schemes, even if properly implemented, are no substitute for agrarian revolutionary changes, to which they must turn.

While it parades its 'human face', there are signals that the Congress rulers are actually preparing for a much more ruthless onslaught on the people, economic and political. In recent years they have sidelined or removed all those last relics who persisted with Nehruvian demagoguery in one sphere or the other, such as Natwar Singh, Arjun Singh and Mani Shankar Aiyer ('non-alignment', 'secularism', 'socialism'), and replaced them with men of the ilk of Chidambaram, S. M. Krishna, Murli Deora, and Kapil

Sibal. Even as its Scheduled Tribes Act talks of recognising tribals' right to forest land, and the NREGA talks of a right to employment, the real thrust of policy is to accelerate the process of accumulation by dispossession, thereby further contracting productive employment. This real thrust was made evident when the new minister for environment and forests, Jairam Ramesh, announced, within a few days of his assuming office that the environmental clearance for 'development' projects needed to be speeded up, and that his ministry would also 'fast-track' clearance for coal mining projects on 'degraded forest land' (an undefined term). This in the face of the established fact that, in the last few years, projects have been receiving environmental clearance at an altogether unprecedented rate, and forest land has been taken over for such projects at multiples of the earlier speed. If even so Ramesh is talking of 'fast-tracking' the process of granting permission, the actual displacement of tribals and other rural dwellers, and destruction of their livelihoods, will also accelerate greatly. The revolutionary forces must prepare the masses to wage determined, long-drawn-out struggles in defence of their land, natural resources, and livelihoods.

A key element in the the UPA's programme for revival of the comprador economy in the coming period is to be the doling out of giant subsidies and outright gifts in the form of privatisations and tax concessions. These transfers to the big comprador firms have already drained the treasury heavily, constricting the scope for expansion of welfare measures in the coming days. Moreover, revenues will have to be raised instead from other sources, such as increased prices of petroleum products. At the same time, the UPA will continue to assess the mood and reaction of the people in the course of the 'reforms', displaying tact and manoeuvring in their actual implementation.

The Congress's return to power was largely as US imperialism would have wished. The Congress had shown its willingness to stake its very government on the Indo-US nuclear deal; and by bringing about the deal's passage through Parliament it demonstrated its effectiveness as a servant of US imperialism. In turn US imperialism used its influence to assist the Congress to the extent it could, for example by putting pressure on Pakistan to take some visible steps regarding those involved in the Mumbai jehadi suicide-attack of November 2008. Thus the Congress could flaunt this, in its election rallies, as proof that it had forced Pakistan to admit that the jihadis came from Pakistan; whereas, in fact, it was the US that forced

Pakistan to make this admission.*

Even at the height of the election campaign, the Indian rulers coordinated closely with US foreign policy in the subcontinent, with regard to both Sri Lanka and Nepal. The Indian military assisted the Sinhala chauvinists in their genocidal war on the Tamils; and the Indian rulers, through their ambassador and other channels, directly intervened in the internal political affairs of Nepal in order to topple the government headed by the UCPN (Maoist), and replace it with a military-backed reactionary regime.

The banner under which the Indian rulers link their reactionary domestic politics with their junior partnership with US imperialism is the "fight against terrorism". In the recent election campaign, the Congress skillfully appropriated the BJP's mantle of firmest fighter against terrorism. It turned to its advantage the fact that it had been in power during the Mumbai jihadi attack, trying to create the rallying-round effect of a 'war government'. Deepening this atmosphere, it 'leaked' a fabricated intelligence finding to the press to the effect that the Taliban was infiltrating the country during the election period (while refusing to confirm or deny the story, the home minister said that the "threat level" was "pretty high").

A special, insidious twist to this propaganda was given by the prime minister when he repeatedly linked "terrorism" with "Naxalism" (or "Maoism"), and named these as the main threats to the country's "security and integrity", hampering "development": "The twin menaces need to be dealt with a firm hand, and we are committed to it." The Congress, he affirmed, was the only party competent to handle these problems. Home minister Chidambaram repeatedly asserted that it was a "naive theory" that "police action and development can go hand in hand in Naxal-affected areas.... Development is important but development can take place only when police action has secured the area." (*Times of India*, April 18, 2009) He reiterated this after the election in the Lok Sabha: the government was "adopting a two-pronged strategy: clear and hold the areas occupied by the naxalites; and carry out development works later." (*The Hindu*, July 8, 2009) What this signifies is that preparations are underway for a much

* Of course, the direction of US policy would be determined by its own interests, not those of the Indian rulers; among the considerations it would keep in mind is the need to avoid further undermining, to the extent possible, the fragile political credibility of the Pakistani rulers.

larger armed assault on the revolutionary movement not only through more and better recruitments, equipment and training, but also in the political sphere. To this end, the ruling classes need to indoctrinate public opinion to view the revolutionary movement as an alarming menace to the public's own security and well-being, which therefore needs to be stamped out ruthlessly irrespective of the human costs. By explicitly jettisoning even the usual ruling-class mantra that the social roots of the Naxalite movement must also be addressed in order to win over the disaffected social sections, the UPA government is displaying its true reactionary colours.

The implication of this development is that, along with the struggle and exposure regarding the rulers' paltry populist measures, the anti-repression struggle, and the positive projection of the democratic and just character of the revolutionary movement, is going to be an important task in the coming days.

To reiterate: Elections are a means for the ruling classes to obtain the stamp of popular legitimacy for their *autocratic* and anti-people rule, as well as a process by which different factions of the ruling classes determine their respective shares in the ongoing and subsequent loot of the working people. In the present conditions of the revolutionary movement and consolidation of proletarian political forces, neither calling upon people to boycott nor exhorting them to vote is the correct tactic. Rather, C.R.s need to expose the uselessness and anti-people character of the parliamentary institutions; project the elements of real democracy in the alternative; and advance (and project) the building of the people's democratic organisations – for asserting their interests and will, and for resisting the imposed will of the ruling classes – as the embryonic form of real democracy: *so making the masses aware that the power to set up real democracy inheres in themselves.*

While there is a special significance to the election-period political campaign, the exposure of the parliamentary institutions and other State institutions, and the assertion of revolutionary democracy, should not be restricted to the election period, but should be *an integral part of the day-to-day activity of the revolutionary forces.*

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