

THE EMERGING PATTERN

THE great constitutional occasion is over. By any test our third general elections represent a stupendous political achievement. The comparative smoothness with which they were conducted over an area of more than one million square miles and the orderliness with which over 100 million voters, the bulk of them illiterate men and women, exercised their franchise do credit to our democracy. The polling in most parts of the country was heavier than in the previous elections and the campaigning in every State was extremely keen and lively. It is too early to assess the nuances of the emerging pattern of political alignments in the country. But as was anticipated by nearly everyone, results so far announced indicate that the Congress will emerge once again as the outstanding national party having a comfortable majority at the Centre and in most of the States. We must reserve for another occasion a more detailed analysis of the political pattern that will obtain in the new Parliament. Perhaps the most disappointing feature of the elections from the all-India point of view is the absence of anything like a national opposition party of any significance. The Praja Socialist Party, which at one time seemed likely to fill the bill, has been virtually wiped out in many States and is likely to be an even more feeble shadow of its original self than it has been in the present Parliament. The Communists, while demonstrating their hold in Kerala, Andhra and West Bengal, are hardly making any headway elsewhere, except perhaps in the Punjab. The Swatantra Party, which was expected to evolve into a well-knit national right-wing party representing a real alternative to the Congress, has fared poorly in the Lok Sabha elections though it has made some dents in the Congress front in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Bihar. Even the Jan Sangh, which set out to build up a recognisable all-India personality this time, has failed to secure any significant representation in Parliament. It is, however, likely to be the largest opposition party in at least three States—Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh—and, in alliance with the Swatantra Party, may well give stiffer battle to the Congress in these States during the coming years.

While the Congress, thanks to its organisation, the prestige of its central leadership and the weakness in resources and organisation of the Opposition parties, has been able to come back to power in most of the States, with slightly reduced majorities, there have been not a few surprises and individual upsets. The defeat of several Ministers in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Mysore, and Madhya Pradesh may be explicable in terms of purely local factors. The dissensions within the Congress on the eve of the elections, resulting in the open

flouting of the Parliamentary Board's decisions by Congress "rebels" who chose to fight the elections as independents, partly explain the reverses which the Congress has sustained in some of the States. Above all, these defeats suggest that the Congress can no longer regard itself as secure even where it has a large majority in the legislature as long as there is a vigorous opposition, which, though small in numbers, can hope to capitalise on the Congress Governments' mistakes.

The elections in the Southern States are most notable in the whole country for the emergence of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam as a solid strong Opposition party in Madras and the remarkable come-back which the Communists have staged in Andhra after their debacle in 1957. The D.M.K.'s victory is even more significant than the Communists' in Andhra because, unlike the Communists, it is a State Party with separatist objectives. The D.M.K.'s "leap forward" from a group of 15 in 1957 to a strength of 50 in 1962 shows that during the intervening five years it has been steadily building up its organisation and hold over a large section of the electorate. While in 1957, it polled 14 per cent of votes, but got only 7 per cent of the seats in the Assembly, this time its strength in the House is roughly in proportion to its share of the poll. The fact that no electoral agreement was reached among the Opposition parties before the elections has undoubtedly helped the Congress in Madras to make a better showing than it might have done. Though it polled less than 50 per cent of the total votes, it has secured 66 per cent of the seats, thus ensuring for itself a comfortable majority for the next five years. But the party will have to reckon with a larger and less heterogeneous opposition. Much will depend on how the D.M.K. proposes to function in the new Assembly. The transition from a demagogic organisation, which has built up a following by emotional appeals to linguistic and ethnic motives, to the position of a responsible Opposition party in the legislature which may hope one day to get into power, will not be an easy one. In the old legislature, the D.M.K. members hardly made themselves felt. The irony of the ballot box, which has thrown out 9 of the 12 sitting members of the D.M.K., including its leader, Mr. C. N. Annadurai, compels the party to learn the rules of parliamentary politics all over again. Forty-seven out of 50 D.M.K. members elected to the Assembly are wholly new to the legislature. Mr. Annadurai may choose to concentrate more on building up the party organisation and giving an effective lead to the legislature party from outside. The time has come when the D.M.K. must do serious rethinking on some of its basic policies if it is to play a constructive and progressive role in Madras and all-India politics. Its slogan of an independent Dravidian Federation comprising the Southern States of Madras, Andhra, Mysore and Kerala, has found no response anywhere outside Tamil Nad. It is doubtful whether this particular slogan weighed very much with the supporters of the D.M.K. in the present elections in which caste and personal loyalties seem to have been quite influential factors in deciding the electors' choices. Tamil Nad, as a State with very limited natural resources and a high density of population, can hope to build up its economy and find useful outlets for the energies and talents of its people only in the larger context of the Indian Union. The D.M.K. will be better serving the interests of the people of Tamil Nad if it turns over a new leaf and makes constructive use of the new opportunities that will come to it as the principal Opposition Party in this State, instead of pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp of an independent Dravidanad — whatever that may mean.