

CHAPTER XXV

PUBLICITY

For obvious reasons political propaganda and publicity are Party propaganda. carried out by political parties most intensively during a general election. An election campaign is in fact largely fed and sustained by propaganda and publicity carried out by the rival political parties and candidates. By its very nature, all such propaganda must be necessarily partisan in favour of the party or the candidate concerned. Party propaganda is not meant to be primarily informative but, on the other hand, cannot but be laudatory or recriminative in a large measure. Its primary object is not to impart political education to the electorate but to persuade the voters to vote in favour of a particular political party or candidate.

In a young democracy like India where the great bulk of the electorate is unfortunately still illiterate, it goes without saying that there is a great deal of ignorance amongst large sections of the public about the fundamental features of our Constitution, the composition, functions and powers of the State Legislatures and the Union Parliament as also the role of the common voter in bringing these legislatures into existence through his vote. Unless the common citizen can intelligently appreciate the nature and functions of the legislatures and the financial powers vested in these bodies, he cannot adequately realise the significance or the value of his vote, nor can he exercise it with the requisite degree of intelligent deliberation and clear understanding of the issues involved.

Political propaganda undertaken by the political parties and the candidates at an election no doubt plays an important though indirect role in educating the electorate in some of these matters, but it cannot be expected to be adequate or fully objective in view of its obvious limitations.

There is, therefore, a vital necessity in a country like India to explain to the electorate in an objective and non-partisan manner the basic features of the democratic system of Government, the role of the individual elector therein, the value and importance of his vote, the real meaning and purpose of the elections and the mechanics of the poll through which the will of the nation is expressed. If the Government of the day were to undertake this task of educating the electorate in the fundamental theory and practice of democracy, their actions would most certainly be misconstrued and looked upon with suspicion by the opposition parties who would accuse the Government of applying public

Political education of the electorate through objective publicity.

funds for conducting political propaganda in favour of the party in power.

The Election Commission accordingly proposed and the Government of India and the State Governments readily agreed that all Governmental publicity for the purpose of educating the public in these matters in connection with the second general elections should be planned and carried out under the direction of the Commission.

Broadsheets, posters and folders. At the instance of the Commission, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India published the following :—

- (a) 1,900,000 copies of a broadsheet entitled "How you should vote".
- (b) 950,000 copies of a poster entitled "Maintain Order at Polling Stations".
- (c) 950,000 copies of a poster entitled "One voter votes at a time".
- (d) 1,900,000 copies of an illustrated folder entitled "Hints for voting".

These were published in 13 languages, namely, Hindi, English, Urdu, Gurmukhi, Oriya, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali and Assamese and widely distributed throughout the country.

Short film. A short film entitled "It is your vote" was brought out by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting under the supervision of the Commission. This film was exhibited in the four thousand and odd cinema halls in the country. Copies of the film were made in two sizes for exhibition viz., 472 prints for 16mm. size projectors and 662 prints for 35mm. size projectors. The cost of production of this film was Rs. 20,139. The film was dubbed in 13 languages, namely, Hindi, English, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Oriya, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Kannada and Assamese. The film explained to the electorate the meaning and the value of their votes and exhorted all adult citizens to exercise their franchise freely and intelligently. In making the film, the most scrupulous care was taken to avoid any matter which might be construed as propaganda in favour of any political party.

Cinema slides. Six cinema slides covering the subjects mentioned below were shown throughout the country :—

- (1) Vote without fear. Your vote is secret.
- (2) Maintain order at polling stations.
- (3) Form separate queues for men and women.
- (4) One voter votes at a time.

- (5) Put your ballot paper into the ballot box through the slit painted white, and
 (6) It is your duty to vote.

Three thousand copies of each slide were made and distributed for exhibition.

The Chief Election Commissioner broadcast on five occasions from the Delhi Station of the All India Radio in English. The subjects covered by these broadcasts were (i) Electoral rights for displaced persons, (ii) Appeal to citizens to check electoral rolls, (iii) Procedure for the coming general elections, (iv) Ensuring free and fair elections, and (v) Appeal for clean elections. The Chief Electoral Officers in the States and the Union territories also spoke from the regional stations of the All-India Radio on topics similar to those mentioned above. These talks were later re-broadcast in the regional languages from the various stations of the All-India Radio. Radio broadcasts.

An election "quiz" programme was undertaken by the Delhi Station of the All-India Radio in which officers of the Election Commission answered on two occasions 26 queries made by the public on matters relating to elections. The programme attracted considerable notice and may, with advantage, be undertaken on a large scale on future occasions. Radio "Quiz" Programme.

The All-India Radio further broadcast additional talks in special audience programmes, particularly in the "Women's programme". Special election features were also included in the rural broadcasts, industrial broadcasts and broadcasts for women. Features, documentaries and dramatised presentation of matters connected with the elections were also broadcast with a view to emphasise points like the duty of every citizen to vote, secrecy of the ballot and such other matters. Other radio broadcasts.

Elaborate and creditable arrangements were made by the All-India Radio to cover election results promptly as soon as they had been declared and special bulletins were introduced for this purpose from all stations. Stations which did not broadcast regional news were provided with special staff in order that the news coverage for the elections might be similar in respect of all the States. Broadcasting of election results.

In fact the election results from even the remotest corner of the country were announced over the All-India Radio Stations within a few hours after they had been declared by the Returning Officers. The results declared by the Returning Officer upto 1 a.m. in the night were invariably announced by the All India Radio in its special bulletin from New Delhi at 6-40 a.m. The detailed election results were prominently displayed by all the daily newspapers of the country.

Broadcasting facilities for political parties.

Before the first general elections of 1951-52, the question arose as to whether broadcasting facilities could be made available to the political parties as is customary in the United Kingdom and some other countries for enabling them to present before the electorate over this medium their respective election manifestoes and appeals for electoral support. In the Report on the first general elections the Commission made the following observations on the question :—

“On account of the multitude of parties, the strength and standing of some of whom were difficult to ascertain, the matter became too controversial and the Election Commission advised Government that it would be almost an impossibility to apportion broadcasting facilities amongst the numerous ‘recognised’ parties with reasonable fairness and to the general satisfaction of the public. The Government accepted the Commission’s advice and no broadcasting facilities were extended to the parties for their election campaign. Now that the number of ‘recognised’ parties has considerably decreased and their comparative strength in the country accurately ascertained, it may be possible to reopen the question and evolve a reasonably satisfactory scheme for extending this facility to the parties for the next general elections.

In September 1956, the Commission made to the Government of India a tentative suggestion that a basic quota of 30 minutes of broadcasting time may be allotted to each recognised political party out of which ten minutes might be made available upto the last date of withdrawal of candidatures while the balance of 20 minutes could be availed of between such withdrawal and the commencement of the poll. The Commission further suggested that the broadcasts on behalf of the recognised All-India Parties might be made on the national programme while that of the recognised State parties might be made from the stations in the respective States where they were recognised. In addition to this basic quota, the Commission suggested that each recognised political party might be given a further quota of broadcasting time calculated on the basis of the percentage of votes secured by the party at the previous general election. The Commission was hopeful that the details of some such basis of calculation of quota could be worked out by general agreement in consultation with the recognised political parties. In the All-Parties conference convened by the Commission in November, 1956, the subject was discussed tentatively and the reactions of the political parties were conveyed to the Government of India.

The suggestions made by the Commission could not, however, be accepted by the Government of India, and on the 19th December, 1956, the Minister for Information and Broadcasting made a statement on the subject in the House of the People. In course of that statement, he made the following points:—

- (a) The practice in this respect is not uniform in the other democratic countries.
- (b) The relevant factors to be taken into consideration are—the area of a country, the form of its Government—Federal or Unitary—and the number of political parties in the country.
- (c) In the U.S.A., broadcasting is run by private enterprise. Though some principles of equal opportunity are laid down by the Federal Communications Commission, radio time has to be purchased and bickerings and dissatisfaction exist.
- (d) In Britain, this facility has been afforded since the second world war only and time is allotted to the parties on the basis of their respective strength and other practical considerations.
- (e) No such facility is allowed in Switzerland.
- (f) It is allowed in France but the time allotted is extremely short.
- (g) In some countries apportionment of time is made according to the number of votes polled and in others according to the number of candidates put up by each party.
- (h) In India, the question was made more complicated than in other countries because of 12 regional languages, 26 broadcasting stations and as many as 27 political parties. Giving time to all political parties would mean a drastic curtailment of the normal activities of the All India Radio.
- (i) No workable formula was possible for allotting broadcasting time to the political parties without giving rise to criticism and imputation of partiality.

The Government decided on all these considerations that by way of an experimental measure, only the four all-India parties would be allowed to supply summaries of their respective election manifestoes and that these would be broadcast by the All-India Radio subject to the usual rules. No summary would be allowed to exceed 10 minutes in duration and was to be broadcast on the same day in English and Hindi from Delhi and in the various regional languages from the other stations of the All India Radio.

On the 10th February, 1957, it was announced that the above-offer of the Government had not been favourably received by all the parties except the Indian National Congress. The Government accordingly withdrew the offer and declared that the All India Radio would keep itself severely aloof from party politics. In the statement that he made, the Minister for Information and Broadcasting, made the following additional points :—

- (i) the All India Radio had been already giving the fullest possible coverage to the election manifestoes and the aims and objects of the political parties;
- (ii) the manifestoes of all recognised parties whether All-India or State had been broadcast by the All India Radio, in extensive summaries in the bulletins;
- (iii) the election speeches of the leaders of the political parties would not be covered, except when they referred to subjects of national or international importance;
- (iv) arrangements had been made to ensure that factual news covering the election from the time of the filing of nomination to the day of the poll would be quickly and fully given by the All India Radio; and
- (v) after counting began, the All India Radio would broadcast the up-to-date result charts daily and, whenever necessary, many times in the day.

The Election Commission regrets that it was not ultimately found possible to make directly available to the recognised political parties the medium of the All India Radio to cover their respective election manifestoes and aims and objects. As observed earlier in this Chapter, the electorate in India cannot yet be said to be fully mature in the political sense and anything that may go to help to develop such maturity should be encouraged within the bounds of practicability. The Commission appreciates that there were many difficulties, administrative and otherwise, which had to be surmounted before it was possible to extend the facilities of the All India Radio to the recognised political parties. In the light of the discussion which the Commission held with these political parties in the All-Parties conference in November, 1956, and the response obtained from them, the Commission ventures, however, to express the view that these difficulties were perhaps not insurmountable and that if they had been placed before the parties by the authorities in time and threshed out at a further All-Parties conference, a practicable scheme generally agreed to by all the recognised All-India political parties might perhaps have been evolved. If the Government of India desire

the Election Commission to help in evolving such a scheme in consultation with these political parties and the technical and administrative officers of the All India Radio and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, it might perhaps yet be possible to arrive at a generally acceptable scheme. Even the modest offer that the Government of India made on the 19th December, 1956, might perhaps have obtained acceptance if a spokesman nominated by each recognised All-India Party had been invited to broadcast a previously approved summary of the party's manifesto. The proposal that an announcer of the All India Radio would do so apparently made the offer unattractive to the majority of the parties. Public interest in such broadcasts would certainly have been heightened if a well-known leader of each party made the broadcast himself on behalf of the party.

The Commission again expresses its hope that the question would be further examined in future in consultation with the recognised All-India Political Parties and that a way would be found to make available the use of this effective medium in future general elections in the interest of educating the electorate more adequately and rousing its active interest in regard to the fundamental issues involved in a general election. The Commission would be glad to make its contribution towards bringing about such an agreed solution if requested to do so.

The future.

As in the first general elections, a unit of the Press Information Bureau of the Government of India was detailed to work in collaboration with the office of the Election Commission during the election period. As a result, the country was kept fully informed of up-to-date election news through the Press. This arrangement worked admirably and yielded excellent results.

The Press Information Bureau.

In addition to the publicity centrally conducted, the Returning Officer of every constituency gave wide publicity to the location of the polling stations, the areas and the number and description of voters covered by each of them, the date of the poll at each polling station and the names and other particulars of the contesting candidates. This they did by distributing leaflets, by beat of drums and by news-items in local newspapers.

The Press played a very important role in educating the voters and in creating and maintaining a keen interest in the elections at all stages. The publicity in the Press was of a high order and reasonably impartial and objective.

The Role of the Press.

The Press gave ample coverage to election news right from the announcement of the election programme upto the declaration of results and even after the elections were completed. They stimulated the interest of the electorate and the general public

by giving wide publicity to every matter connected with the elections and thus sustained public interest in the elections all through. The election manifestoes of the leading political parties were given prominent coverage in the Press.

As the election tempo gathered momentum, the Press highlighted every outstanding event as it came and by the time poll commenced, interest in the elections had become all-absorbing. Many newspapers published special articles explaining the voting procedure in detail for the benefit of the electorate. Some of them introduced a new feature containing "Election Tit-bits".

The Election Commission made special arrangements so that election news was made available to the Press as quickly as possible.