

## CHAPTER XXVII

### ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The successful conduct of a general election in a vast country like India depends to a large extent on the co-operation of the political parties. During the years intervening between the two general elections, the Commission availed of every opportunity of consulting the political parties on all important outstanding problems. A procedure was also developed for election officers at all levels to meet the local representatives of political parties on suitable occasions for mutual consultations and exchange of ideas and information.

The Commission sought the co-operation of the recognised political parties for the successful completion of the elections and took them fully into confidence at every stage. Many difficulties and problems were discussed with them and their views were sought and given due weight. In particular, the Commission invited their opinion about the period and the actual dates which would be most suitable for holding the poll for the second general elections. The election programme was settled by the Commission only after taking their views into account along with those of the Central and the State Governments. The Commission also consulted the political parties before making its recommendations to the Central Government in respect of the amendments proposed to be made in the election law before the second general elections. The Commission acknowledges with gratitude the co-operation and advice extended to it by the political parties in a generous measure.

Consultation with recognised national parties.

At the instance of the Election Commission, steps were taken at the State level by the Chief Electoral Officers to ensure that there was similar co-operation and co-ordination between the political parties and the election machinery of every State in regard to the arrangements for the general elections. Meetings were arranged by the Chief Electoral Officers with representatives of the political parties. In these meetings all difficulties and problems were discussed as they arose from time to time. The different points of view expressed by the political parties were fully considered before taking any final decisions.

Consultation with political parties in the States.

The Commission felt that even the Returning Officers at the constituency level could equally usefully meet the contesting candidates and the local representatives of the political parties as often as necessary during the election period and that such meetings should take place particularly between the last date of the withdrawal of candidatures and the conclusion of the poll. The Commission communicated this advice to the Returning

Consultation with political parties at constituency level.

Officers and some of them did in fact act up to the advice with very encouraging results. Many Returning Officers apparently fought shy of meeting the political parties and the contesting candidates on the eve of the elections. As a result, the friendly co-operation that the Commission desired to establish at all levels between the election machinery and the political parties could not be developed on a wide enough scale at the constituency level. The Commission hopes, however, that such liaison and active co-operation in a common cause will be a common feature in the coming years and would make the elections a truly national undertaking.

The Commission places a good deal of importance on a free and frank exchange of views between the election officials and political parties at all levels in regard to all non-political matters pertaining to elections. As a result of these meetings there was a greater appreciation of mutual difficulties and the scope for misunderstandings was materially reduced. Appeals were made to the political parties in these conferences as also on other occasions to extend their co-operation to the authorities in the maintenance of law and order and the reduction of electoral offences and irregularities so that the elections might be conducted cleanly and in an orderly and peaceful manner. Efforts were made as far as practicable to associate the political parties closely at each different stage of the elections. Copies of press notes and of all instructions and circulars of general interest which were issued from time to time by the Commission and the Chief Electoral Officers were supplied to every political party.

Delimitation of constituencies.

Some members of the legislatures were appointed as Associate Members to assist the Delimitation Commission in its work. They were selected so as to represent the different political parties. Through these Associate Members, the political parties contributed materially in the task of the delimitation of constituencies. Apart from the Associate Members, many other sitting members of the Central and the State Legislatures, as also other prominent members of the political parties, took considerable interest in the delimitation of constituencies, particularly at the stage of public hearings. In many instances they offered valuable alternative proposals for the Delimitation Commission's consideration and actively took part in the discussions at the public hearings. The Delimitation Commission found many of these alternatives useful in formulating its own final discussions.

Preparation of Electoral Rolls.

It is, however, unfortunate that political parties still take too little interest in the annual revision of the electoral rolls in non-election years whether such revision is intensive or non-intensive in character. The tremendous task of enrolling hundreds of

millions of voters and keeping the rolls up-to-date had accordingly to be undertaken by the Governmental machinery alone virtually without any effective aid from the political parties.

In order to enable the better organised political parties to play a more effective part in the annual revision of the electoral rolls, the Rules were amended so as to provide for the free supply of two copies of the draft electoral rolls to every recognised political party. It was hoped that the parties would utilise these copies for getting them checked by their workers in the field and point out to the Electoral Registration Officers all mistakes and shortcomings in the rolls which came to their notice.

Free supply of electoral rolls to recognised parties.

The parties can play an effective and important part in the revision of the rolls by suggesting (a) the inclusion therein of the names of all qualified persons whose names do not occur therein, (b) the deletion therefrom of the names of persons who are dead or are not qualified under the law and (c) the correction of all defective or erroneous entries. The Commission felt that the parties would not be in a position to render effective assistance to the registration authorities if copies of the electoral roll were supplied to them at so late a stage as the publication of the roll in draft inasmuch as the time at the disposal of the parties for making suggestions for improving the roll would be too short. Any such suggestions received after the publication of the rolls must be made in the shape of formal claims and objections before the Revising Authorities within the short period of 21 days which is available under the law for filing all such claims and objections. Filing formal claims and objections on a large-scale and getting them decided by the Revising Authorities is a cumbersome procedure and is suitable only for individual cases. The Commission accordingly directed that each recognised political party should be supplied with the copies of the electoral roll in two convenient instalments. According to this direction, as soon as the electoral roll for a constituency is finally published in any year, two copies thereof are supplied to every recognised political party by way of the first instalment of the draft electoral roll for the next year. This is done to enable the parties to make all necessary enquiries and to bring at an early stage all defects in the roll informally to the notice of the Electoral Registration Officer. The Electoral Registration Officer is then able to verify every such complaint of defect and incorporate the necessary corrections while preparing the draft electoral roll for the succeeding year. As soon as the electoral roll so corrected is published in the draft in the succeeding year, two copies of the draft roll (if it is reprinted in full) or of the draft lists of amendments (if no such reprinting is undertaken) are supplied to every recognised party as the second and final instalment of the draft rolls. Any further inclusions, deletions or corrections which may

be suggested by the political parties at this stage would of course have to be applied for by way of formal claims, objections or applications for correction.

Parties requested to supply lists of dead, absent or non-existent electors.

The Election Commission had expected that after receiving the copies of the finally published electoral rolls of 1956, the parties would supply to the election officers well before the general elections of 1957 lists of electors who were dead, absent or non-existent. If such lists had been carefully and thoroughly prepared and supplied to the election officers by the political parties, it would have helped materially in making the electoral rolls substantially correct and complete in 1957. Moreover, these lists even if supplied late could have been made use of in checking cases of impersonation of voters at the general elections in 1957. When the copies of the rolls were supplied to the recognised political parties, the Chief Electoral Officers requested them to supply to the Returning Officer of each constituency, at least a fortnight before the commencement of the poll in the constituency, a list of the names of those electors entered in the rolls who had been found by the parties to be dead, absent or non-existent. The parties were also informed by the Commission that it would be preferable and would add to the weight to be attached to such lists if they could co-operate with each other in the matter and submit agreed lists of such persons.

Poor response from parties.

It is disappointing to note that in spite of all these attempts at securing the co-operation of the political parties in improving the electoral rolls, there was very little response from them in this regard and very few lists of dead, absent and non-existent voters were communicated to the Returning Officers. Informal suggestions for amendments to the electoral rolls before they are published in draft have also been very rare from the political parties. The Election Commission is constrained to observe in these circumstances that the main objective of supplying free copies of electoral rolls to recognised political parties has substantially failed so far.

Grievance of unrecognised political parties.

On the other hand, unrecognised political parties have often expressed an understandable grievance to the effect that preferential treatment has been accorded to the recognised parties in this matter and they have criticised this provision of the law as discriminatory in nature. They have demanded that a similar privilege should be extended to them as well, or else, the privilege should be withdrawn from the recognised political parties. The Commission agrees that in case the recognised political parties continue to make no effective use of the free copies of the electoral rolls supplied to them, there would be no justification in future for making a free present of these copies to them and allowing the unrecognised parties to harbour this legitimate grievance. It would, however, be fair to allow some

more time to the recognised parties to gear up their machinery and organisation for effective co-operation in this regard. The Commission hopes that in the coming years the recognised parties would be able to make a material contribution towards the proper and exhaustive revision of the electoral rolls. The question of withdrawing this privilege from the recognised parties may be raised and re-considered only if they have substantially failed to justify this hope.

As the general elections drew nearer, the political parties commenced their campaign for electoral support with vigour and energy. The peak of electioneering was reached only after the nomination papers had been filed. Representatives of political parties attended official election rehearsals and made themselves familiar with the mechanism of the ballot boxes and the practical procedure and mechanics of the poll. It was in a large measure due to the efforts of the political parties and their workers that the voters, particularly the uneducated and the illiterate ones, became election-minded and realised the value of their votes.

Complaints have sometimes been voiced that young students were being utilised to an increasing degree for participation in active electioneering on partisan lines. These complaints were made after the first as well as the second general elections. In view of the not too satisfactory spirit of discipline already prevailing amongst the student population in some parts of the country, there are obvious draw-backs in dragging young and immature boys and girls into the excitement and polemics of the political arena.

The Secondary Education Commission appointed by the Government of India in September, 1952, under the Chairmanship of Dr. A. Lakshmanswamy Mudaliar recommended *inter alia* that suitable legislation should be passed making it an election offence to utilise students below the age of 17 for any of the purposes of political propaganda or election campaign in order that a spirit of healthy and sound discipline might be promoted among the students.

The Commission feels that mere legislation would hardly achieve the objective in view. A strong public opinion in this regard needs to be created first. Once all right-thinking people come to agree that the immature youth of the country need to be protected from the hurly-burly of active electioneering and partisan demonstrations, this evil will be easier to eradicate. At any rate, it is at that stage only that the necessary legislation may be usefully undertaken in this regard. The first step would obviously be to enlist the support of the main political parties in building up a universally accepted convention that no candidate must employ young boys and girls, say, below 18 years of age,

for furthering his election campaign. In the absence of such support, mere legislation in this regard would not only be too controversial a measure but would be likely to prove largely ineffective in practice.

Issue of voters,  
identity chits by  
political parties.

The political parties and the independent candidates were encouraged to supply to each voter an identity chit containing (i) his name, (ii) his serial number in the electoral roll, (iii) the name of the village or the ward and (iv) the page number of the electoral roll in which his name had been entered. The suggestion was adopted almost universally. The chit was produced by the voter on the date of poll at the polling station and ensured his ready identification. This was of very great help to the polling staff in readily locating the entry relating to every voter on the roll and materially expedited the poll.

Co-operation in  
maintaining law  
and order.

The Commission gratefully acknowledges the full co-operation extended by all the political parties in the maintenance of law and order during the poll and generally for the successful conduct of the elections in every State. Some complaints were no doubt made by the workers of one party against those of some other rival party in a few keenly contested constituencies. Such complaints were, however, few in number and not very serious in nature. The most significant contribution made by the political parties was their peaceful canvassing during the elections. The parties co-operated with the State election authorities in many ways and it was largely due to their co-operation that the task was so well accomplished.