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South-east Calcutta

WEST BENGAL, that is, partitioned Bengal, may not be one of the largest units of the Indian Union. Calcutta may have lost some of its importance as an industrial city since the gradual emergence of satellite towns near and around the eastern metropolis. But south-east Calcutta is still considered to be the political nerve-centre of politically-conscious Calcutta. South-east Calcutta went to the polls last Sunday to choose its nominee for the House of the People. On the same day Nabadwip held a by-election for a seat in Parliament due to the death of Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra. Though the elections in both the constituencies have been keenly contested, political interest and speculation remain centred on the south-east Calcutta constituency-

There have been many by-elections since the last general election. Some of the by-elections for Parliament have been hotly contested. Some of these battles of the ballot-box have revealed intriguing phases in the country's changing politics. But the contest for the south-east Calcutta constituency is commonly regarded as a significant by-election. South-east Calcutta has a typical middle-class make-up. Not only in this country, but throughout the world, the middle-class has certain pronounced characteristics. It is the backbone of society. Its members are educated, and politically informed.

South-east Calcutta's voters have typical middle-class characteristics. They are educated and enlightened. But, unlike the middle class, they are not necessarily conservative in social or political outlook. South-east Calcutta's voting record is a revealing commentary on this constituency's voters, as well as on the various phases of the country's politics. It was from this constituency that the late Sarat Bose, brother of Netaji, won a decisive election against his Congress rival. South-east Calcutta is proud of its choice of the late Shyama Prasad Mookerjee as its nominee for Parliament in the last general elections against formidable Congress and Communist rivals.

Congress relies on the middle-class look of this constituency for support. This Congress assumption is not without basis altogether. In the elections for the State Assembly, south-east Calcutta has voted mainly for Congress. But it is not without significance that, in the last general elections, this constituency has also voted at least two Communist candidates for the Assembly. And this despite the failure of the Communists in West Bengal in the last general elections. South-east Calcutta may be a mixed constituency so far as the State Assembly is concerned, but in elections for Parliament, as also in all crucial elections, this constituency has shown a distinct anti-Congress bias.

Results of the two Parliamentary by-elections are not known at the time of going to press. But reports so far available show that the Communist candidate from the south-east Calcutta constituency may win this seat, while the margin by which the Congress candidate is anticipated to win the Nabadwip election is likely to be much less comfortable than originally expected. If Congress made a major political blunder in contesting this constituency against the late Sarat Bose,

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it has made an equally major tactical error in nominating Dr Radha Binode Pal as its candidate for Parliament from south-east Calcutta.

Dr Pal, the able jurist who earned international fame by his judgment on Japan's war guilt, is a widely respected person. He has an established reputation as an independent of mature political outlook. It would have been diplomatic of Congress to allow Dr Pal to contest the elections as an independent candidate. Had Dr Pal fought the battle under his own political banner, he would most probably have won the election by a fair margin. Congress, no doubt, wanted to exploit Dr Pal's established prestige. But the Communists are not unaware of the tactics of political propaganda. They have made political capital out of Dr Pal's changed political complexion. And it is symbolic of the political tactics of the Communists that they have, not been as critical of Dr Pal as of the diabolic tactics of Congress. If it was the intention of Congress to prove that the Communists have no support among the masses, it should have had the sense to employ more subtle electioneering tactics. Congress is to blame if Dr Pal is defeated (which seems most likely) by the rival Communist can-

didate, Shri Sadhan Gupta, the brilliant blind barrister whose father is a Congress member of the West Bengal Assembly.

Irrespective of the party/or the candidate, who wins the two West Bengal by-elections for Parliament, they underline significant political trends. Contrary to the feverish election campaign, the polling was comparatively poor. Even so, the voters were more active in rural Nabadwip than in the predominantly urban south-east Calcutta constituency. Does this mean that the popular impression that Calcutta is politically conscious is exaggerated?

Two major political trends, as reflected in these by-elections, need to be emphasised. It is evident that the political parties have learnt a lesson from the last general elections. There were too many splinter groups contesting the general elections. Congress was returned to power on the split-vote. Its rivals seem determined not to oblige Congress any longer. In the main, four political parties are contesting these by-elections. Independents, the Praja Socialist Party and the Communists are the rivals of Congress. Although the decision of the Election Com-

missioner has forced many of the splinter groups to recede into the background, the reduction in the number of political parties contesting the elections reflects more truly the current political make-up of the country.

Even so, the developments relating to the election fight in the south-east Calcutta constituency stress the need for a more compact formation of political parties. On the assumption that the struggle in India, as in all South-East Asian countries, is between Left and Further Left, there is either a need for Congress to move more to the Left, or for the parties of the Left to unite, to give a more determined fight to the Communists. In India the parties of the Left are so divided among themselves that a United Left Party is not likely to be formed in the near future. Here is scope and chance for PSP to forge ahead. But PSP is a political organisation with a split personality. It has yet to decide whether Congress or the Communist Party is more "democratic". Today it is performing a negative function in the country's politics. It must develop a positive attitude and approach to wrest the initiative from Congress in its fight against Communism.

Madame Molotov's Tea Party

SIX months ago, when Sir Winston Churchill proposed a Big Power Conference, he captured the imagination of the people on both sides of the "iron curtain". Moscow welcomed the proposal. It was hailed by Asia. With the exception of Bonn and Washington, it had a sympathetic reception in all the capitals of the Western countries. Bonn was suspicious about Sir Winston's suggestion for an Eastern Locarno. Washington, pre-occupied with Mr Dulles's aggressive foreign policy of "liberation", frowned on the British Prime Minister's suggestion for a "parley at the summit".

Moscow had reservations on Sir Winston's assurances to Dr Adenauer. But the Soviet Union, still uncertain of the repercussions of Stalin's death, found it diplomatic to endorse the British Prime Minister's peace initiative. Washington was critical of the purpose behind Sir Winston's call for the Bermuda Conference. But it was widely believed that, in the political climate of those days, President Eisenhower would have found

it difficult to reject Sir Winston's request for four-Power talks.

Sir Winston is a determined statesman. With his health regained, he pursued his original intention with purposeful vigour. There was an unmistakable ring of satisfaction in Sir Winston's recent announcement that the postponed Bermuda Conference would be held in the first week of December. He expressed the hope that the Conference would still result in the meeting of the heads of the principal States. But the events since May caused doubts about the prospects of a settlement among Russia and the Western Powers at the moment.

It would be idle to speculate whether the events, seemingly embarrassing to the Soviet Union, in East Berlin and in Eastern Europe¹ would have occurred had Sir Winston's diplomatic initiative in May been followed by high-level talks last June. But the intervening anti-Communist demonstrations in East Berlin and in Eastern Europe have provided the

American Secretary of State with arguments against any *modus vivendi* with Russia at the moment. No doubt Mr Dulles will pursue this line of reasoning during the forthcoming Bermuda Conference.

This is evident from Mr Dulles's observations before the annual convention of the Congress of Industrial Organisations. He argues that Russia's refusal to have talks with the Western Powers—this is evidently a reference to the Russian Note of November 3—indicates her fears that she may lose control over the peoples behind the "iron curtain". He suggests that the Kremlin has "retreated into a diplomatic defensive" while the Western Powers have regained the diplomatic and moral initiative. Mr Dulles is free to interpret whether Moscow's terms for an agreed settlement with the West reflect Russia's growing strength or weakness. But the American Secretary of State is as ominous as ever in his emphasis on his policy of "liberation".

Unlike Washington, London ap-