

# 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha Elections and Beyond

Saturday 16 May 2009, by [CPI \(ML\) Liberation](#) (Date first published: 5 May 2009).

In vain were the galaxy of film stars and other celebrities pressed into service for encouraging citizens to pay ballot tributes to the great Indian democracy. The third phase of polling — which the Election Commission described as “extremely satisfactory” — saw a voter turnout of just about 50%, down from 55 per cent in phase II and 60% in phase I. The EC blamed it on “heat conditions”, but the argument does not sound convincing. West Bengal for example is witnessing an almost unprecedented heat wave this year, but polling has been relatively better at 64%. Behind this lies a combination of two factors: the people’s eagerness to teach the CPI(M) another lesson after the punishment meted out in last year’s panchayat polls and the ruling party’s desperate attempt to minimise the inevitable decline in its MP tally.

However, the general picture in the country as a whole (a degree of regional variations notwithstanding) is that today the major national and regional parties do not find themselves in a position to mobilise the dominant social groups and powerbrokers to ‘manage’ the polling the way they have done in the past. Here lies the most important political reason behind the very low voter turnout in the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections. The mainstream parties’ track records while in office have been extremely poor and they have no credible future plans for redressing the economic and other woes of the masses. As for the different alliances they belong to, these are either shattered by centrifugal forces or remain too amorphous to carry conviction with the voters. In a word, politically they are very much on the defensive.

On the other side of the same coin we see, most notably in large parts of the Hindi heartland, a correspondingly higher assertion of popular forces in the election process. Hopefully, this may also get translated into the emergence of a revolutionary opposition in Parliament — a genuine people’s opposition to consistently fight for the downtrodden. Even otherwise, the gains made by the revolutionary Left during the campaign will not be lost. The militant activism of the people unleashed during the campaign has already opened up broader avenues for further development of mass movements after the elections and for us this is the main thing, the permanent core agenda of left politics.

In sharp contrast to our perception and priorities, the national leadership of CPI(M) is zealously pursuing “politics as the art of the possible” in the meanest and most vulgar sense of the phrase. A very prominent Politburo member of the party was recently in Patna openly inviting the RJD, the JD (U) and the LJP — the very forces against which his party is currently locked in a pitched battle in alliance with the CPI (ML) and CPI — to help form a “secular government” at the centre. Even as resentment against this act of sabotaging the fledgling left unity in Bihar ran high in Left circles in the State, the senior leader reiterated his party’s position in subsequent interviews/press meets in Delhi and Kolkata. He had personally met Sharad and Nitish to advance the cause of this alliance, he added. (Curiously enough, Rahul Gandhi also has since called upon Nitish, Jaylalita and Chandrababu — the main opponents of the Congress in the States concerned — to help form a Congress-led government.) In Kolkata he also reaffirmed the Biman Basu- Budhhadev Bhattacharya line that on the question of supporting a Congress-led government the party will take a decision only after the election results are out. Clearly, this contradicts in no uncertain terms Parkash Karat’s previous statement that his party would rather sit in the opposition than support the Congress.

The political implication of all these overtures is clear. The leading party of the Left Front/Third Front as well as the leader of the UPA are both keeping all doors and windows open and bracing for a nasty post-poll game of numbers where anything can happen and everything can be justified in the holy cause of cobbling up a so-called secular government. Naturally the BJP too will be playing all its cards. For a time the pragmatic power politics of the ruling elite will thus dominate the Indian scene. But there is yet another kind, a very different kind of politics — the turbulent politics of the masses on the move demanding urgent solutions to the economic crisis they have been thrown into and the plethora of other unresolved problems. Sooner rather than later this kind of politics will come to predominate, the more so because none of the existing political formations will get a clear mandate to rule and instability will be haunting the assembled government of assorted opportunists from the very start. To redouble our efforts to lead this people's politics of resistance remains the absolute priority and responsibility of all genuine left forces in the country.

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\* From ML Update, a CPI(ML) Weekly News Magazine, Vol. 12 No. 19, 05-11 MAY 2009.