

# IN THE COLONIES

## **Indian Communists in the Election Struggle.**

By M. N. Roy.

Four Communist candidates were put up at the last **Municipal Election of Bombay**, held on January 31. This is the first time that Communists participated in any election in India. Indeed, hitherto no working class candidate of any complexion has participated in any election struggle. Considering the extreme limitedness of the franchise in India there was, of course, very little chance for a working class representative to be elected. A larger section of the people has the right to vote in municipal elections than in the election of the National or Provincial legislatures. Nevertheless, even the municipal electorate falls far short of universal suffrage, excluding practically the entire wor-

king class. Fighting under these entirely unfavourable conditions, the pioneers of Bombay were, of course, defeated. They did not expect to gain seats in the municipal council elected by an almost purely bourgeois franchise, and packed with capitalist agents. They participated in the elections with the purpose of mobilising the working class and the oppressed urban petty bourgeoisie in the struggle against foreign imperialism and native capitalism. In this they won remarkable success.

Since the introduction of Reforms in 1919, a few "labour representatives" sat not only in the Municipal Councils of big cities like Bombay and Calcutta, but even in the Provincial and National parliaments. They are not elected by the working class, but nominated by the British government and, as such, are rather defenders of imperialism than of the Indian working class. By contesting the municipal election of Bombay the Communists challenged this fraudulent representation of labour.

One hundred and forty five candidates contested the election to 74 seats. The total electorate is about 600,000. That is, if all the voters participated in the elections, which is hardly the case, approximately 4,000 votes would be cast for each candidate, on the average. The four Communist candidates polled 12,453 votes. Thus they did not poll much lower than the average calculated on the assumption that all the voters participated in the election. Indeed, two of them were beaten by the narrow margin of 227 and 146, being at the top of the unsuccessful candidates in their respective districts.

In view of the fact that very few of the workers have the right to vote, this result indicates the spread of Communist influence even over the poor petty bourgeoisie. Had the working class been enfranchised, there would have been a crushing Communist victory. For, during a whole year the proletariat of Bombay have been carrying on a determined fight under Communist leadership against the capitalist offensive; the "Red Flag" Trade Union, organised by the Communists in the course of this struggle, alone has a membership of over 80,000. This being the case, no less than a quarter of a million votes would have been cast for the Communists, giving them all the mandates from the proletarian districts, were the working class enfranchised.

Owing to the doubtful position of the Communist Party, and the general antagonism to Communism that characterises the present bourgeois political atmosphere of the country, the election was contested in the name of the Workers' and Peasants' Party. But the candidates are all popular leaders of the Bombay proletariat, and are well-known as Communists not only to the British government and bourgeois nationalists, but also to the working class. If they are persecuted and hated by the former as Communists, precisely as such they are loved and trusted by the proletariat.

The demands with which they contested the election made the class character of the candidates evident. In addition to the basic political demand for complete national independence, as against the compromise policy of bourgeois nationalists, the following immediate demands were put forward: 1. Free education, recreation and medical relief for the working class; 2. Municipal relief for unemployed; 3. Increase of the wages of the manual and clerical workers employed by the Municipality at the expense of the highly paid officials; 4. Cheap house-rent for the workers; 5. Heavy taxation of industries; 6. Adult suffrage; 7. Abolition of nominated seats on the Municipal Council; and 8. Municipal ownership of Suburban railways, tramways, gas and electricity works.

The election campaign was combined with the general revolutionary working class agitation and propaganda. For example, the Lenin Memorial Day was just a week before the election. A mass meeting was held on that occasion. The election campaign was closely connected with the Bombay Uprising, which took place three days after the election. Obviously, the mobilisation of the masses during the election campaign gave a great impetus to the determination of the working class to push their resistance to capitalist offensive to the extent of street-fighting.

By contesting the election the Communists gave another sign of their political independence. Most resolute fighters for national freedom, they will defend the interests of the working class not only against foreign imperialism, but also native capitalism. By these tactics of revolutionary class struggle the Communists will

**mobilise and lead the proletariat as the driving force of the national revolution.**

**The election result indicates another thing — the general radicalisation of the entire political situation. While, under conditions entirely unfavourable, the Communists, contesting the elections for the first-time, polled nearly the average vote, a number of right wing nationalists, who for years had sat on the Municipal Council, were routed. This shows that, although the petty bourgeois masses do not as yet follow the Communists, they are being influenced by the rising tide of proletarian revolt. The fearless exposure of the character of bourgeois nationalism by the Communists helped the petty bourgeoisie to refuse their support to the out-spoken right wingers, and to cast their votes for more radical nationalist candidates.**

**In short, this new move of the Communists has had much greater effect upon the situation than its immediate result. It cannot be judged by the number of votes polled by the Communists, which nevertheless, is not negligible having regard to Indian conditions.**