

The Mandate must not be misread
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To everyone surprise, the Congress (Indira) has got 206 seats; more than one third of the total seats. Along with its allies, it has secured 261 seats; 9 seats short of a majority. Dr. Manmohan Singh is ready to take the top post once again. India voted for a stable and secular government. The mandate is surely against those politicians and political parties who shamelessly bargained to serve their own causes. People of India have voted against opportunistic and cynical politics. Those politicians and small parties who only cared about fulfilling their own self interest have been given a big blow. People have also rejected the divisive and arrogant politics of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). Left parties, particularly the Communist Party of India (Marxist), has to learn lessons from the result in West Bengal. But, while pro-market forces and vested interests are trying to make us all believe that Left weakened because it played a dogmatic role at the centre; its disappointing tally is more related to state level factors in West Bengal, than national factors. However, there may be criticism of the kind of alternative, in the form of third front, it tried to build against Congress and BJP. Congress is giving credit to pro-people schemes launched by a Government formed under its leadership for its electoral success, including National Rural Employment Guarantee (NAREGA). The constructive and crucial role played by Left parties at the centre in regard to such schemes is known to many, but might not have been publicized enough during the campaigning phase.

In no way the mandate given to the Congress (I) should be misunderstood as a mandate for unabated reforms and elitist economic policies. Pro-market forces, and domestic as well as foreign corporate interest groups are arguing that it is a mandate to speed up the reform process and further liberalisation of investments in sectors like Banking, Insurance, multi brand retail, aviation.

Congress needs to be cautious as grabbing agricultural land for the industry, displacing communities for mining corporations, and unregulated entry of corporate in the retail sector are gaining momentum. Majority of the people including dalits, tribals, small farmers, informal workers, women, minorities, small businesses, manufacturers, low income families has been victims of growth and destructive development. Congress must resist the domestic and international pressure to further open up the market. The mandate given to the party is for Congress *Aam Aadmi* (common man) plank and not for serving corporate and foreign interest. Congress manifesto promises rice and wheat at Rupees 3 per kilogram. It is now time to deliver the promises.

In no way, the mandate is for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in retail. Election manifesto of many political parties including BJP, CPM and Samajwadi Party clearly mentioned their stance against FDI in retail. The total vote share of those parties is higher than what Congress has got. Before the elections, Mr. Kamal Nath, Minister of Commerce and Industry said that it is not only left parties but Congress itself that has been against FDI in retail. Mr. Kamal Nath has once again been re-elected for the parliament after trailing in initial rounds and he had to take support of film stars to woo voters. Mr. Kamal Nath and the new Government need cautious and controlled actions on issues which may have implications for livelihood of millions. Signing Free Trade Agreements as a main trade policy strategy is only one instance.

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