

UNPRINCIPLED ELECTORAL ADJUSTMENT

Few political parties were taken by surprise by the dissolution of Parliament. Many were angry that the time available for organising themselves was not adequate. As only the Prime Minister knew her mind, she had the advantage over the others.

The dissolution has introduced an element of urgency in the thinking and action of political parties. Within the next ten days all the political parties will have chosen their candidates. It would by then be known whether there would be defections from parties.

An interesting pattern of politics is developing in the country. Some of the parties have declared that they would not enter into any electoral adjustment with any party at the national level though they might agree to adjustment at the State level.

For instance, the Ruling Congress, which had the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Muslim League as its allies in the Kerala Assembly elections, will not have any such alliance with them now for the Lok Sabha election though it would not mind electoral adjustment with them. This is perhaps designed to impress the electorate in the Hindi-speaking States which are hostile to any link with the Muslim League.

The BKD, which is practically a regional party, has also adopted the slogan "no adjustment at the national level, but only at the State level". In Rajasthan, the BKD has formed an alliance with the Organisation Congress, the Jan Sangh, the Swatantra and the SSP. What will happen in Uttar Pradesh, which is indeed an important State so far as the Lok Sabha election is concerned?

The BKD has decided to go it alone in Uttar Pradesh and its leader, Charan Singh, said that his party would contest 75 out of the 86 seats. Charan Singh's principal ambition is to become the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh though he would not mind being the Prime Minister of India. Ultimately he would join that group which offers him the best chance of fulfilling his ambition.

The anticipated united front of the Organisation Congress, the

Jan Sangh, the SSP and the Swatantra has emerged. Swatantra leader Masani was certainly right in saying that an electoral adjustment alone would not suffice to bring about a united front so necessary to thwart Mrs Indira Gandhi's plans. Past experience has shown that a front without a positive programme, and formed with a negative and limited objective would not survive.

Two important developments have occurred during the last week. The Tamil Nadu Legisla-

tive Assembly has been dissolved even though the ruling DMK had overwhelming majority in the House. The Mysore and Gujarat Governments, owing allegiance to the Organisation Congress, have decided not to have a midterm poll for the Assembly. The reasoning in the two cases is interesting.

In Tamil Nadu, the DMK must have found that its prestige is steadily going down. It found it necessary to come to an electoral adjustment with six other parties, including the CPI and the Muslim League, to contest six or seven municipal council elections.

If for municipal elections the DMK felt the need for an alliance, it is obvious that it could not think of facing the Assembly or the Lok Sabha poll by itself.

Secondly, Chief Minister Karunanidhi, commenting on the dissolution of the Lok Sabha,

said that the Prime Minister wanted absolute majority. What he left unsaid was that the Prime Minister, if she got an absolute majority, would not need the support of the DMK and so would not be interested in maintaining co-operation with the DMK after the election.

The thinking among Congressmen running the government in Mysore and Gujarat is on different lines. Supposing they had a midterm poll, what is one to expect from it? If they retained their present majority in the State Assembly and Mrs Gandhi continued as Prime Minister again, then there would be no change in the situation. But if they lost in the election, they would be committing the mistake of having invited self-destruction.

There seems to be some thinking among Congressmen that if there is a possibility of the two Congress parties producing an absolute majority, pressures may develop in both the camps for a reunion.

Interesting developments may be expected after the election.

Prasad