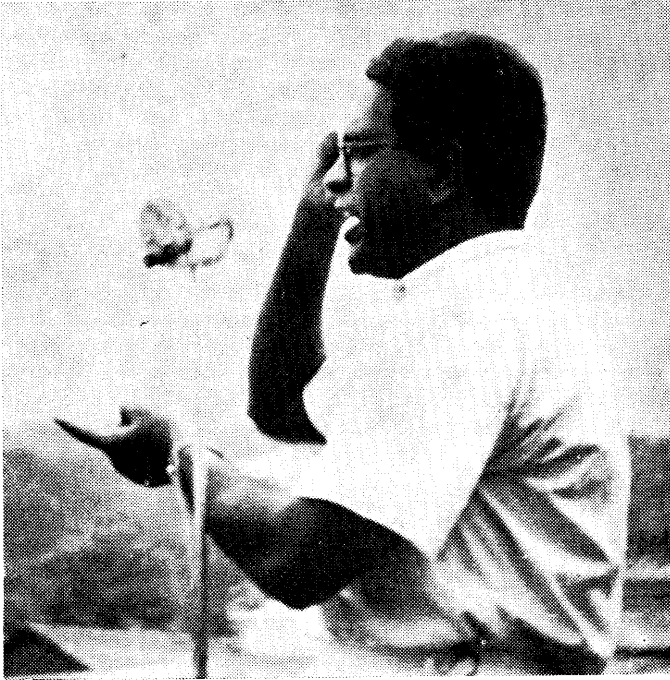


COLVIN R. DE SILVA



**Lessons of
the Local Govt.
Elections**

THE ELECTION RESULTS IN THE URBAN AREAS

Eight Urban Councils and three Municipal Councils have held their general elections this year. The 8 Urban Councils are Kalutara, Panadura, Moratuwa, Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia, Kotte, Badulla and Hatton. The three Municipal Councils are Negombo, Kandy and Colombo. The results as they affected our Party and the Stalinist Front are shown in the table on pages 2 and 3.

The results enable us to draw some important political conclusions.

Take, for instance, Kalutara, Panadura and Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia. They are the central urban areas of three Parliamentary constituencies which the LSSP won in 1947 and lost to the UNP in 1952. Further, the entire Left previously had only one member (an LSSPer) in the Kalutara Urban Council, none in Panadura and three (all elected as LSSPers) in Dehiwala-Mt.Lavinia. What is the position today?

TREND TOWARDS LSSP

Today, all three Councils have been captured either by the LSSP directly or by the Left for the first time in their history.

The LSSP group, now four, in the Kalutara Urban Council combining with the single Stalinist Fronter, has won control, thrown out the UNP chairman, Mr. P. A. Cooray, and elected an LSSP chairman, Comrade Cholmondeley Goonewardene. Cholmondeley, incidentally, was the former MP of the Kalutara constituency. It was Mr. Cooray who defeated and replaced him as MP.

In Panadura, the two LSSPers and the two Stalinist Fronters have combined to elect a Stalinist Fronter as chairman. Incidentally, the two Stalinist Fronters are both ex-LSSPers who campaigned as Samasamajists. Moreover, in Panadura alone, the Stalinist Front accepted a mutual support agreement with the LSSP.

In Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia, LSSPer Edmund Samarakody has been elected chairman. He heads a group of 4 LSSPers, one Stalinist Fronter, who previously held his seat as an LSSPer and fought as a Samasamajist, and an "independent socialist" who defeated an LSSPer by a slim majority. The ousted UNP chairman was none other than Mr. S. de S. Jaysinghe, who defeated and re-placed the writer of this article at the 1952 Parliamentary General Elections.

It is plain from the above that, in the areas where the LSSP had formerly held Parliamentary constituencies and lost them at the General Election, the LSSP has not only recovered lost ground but also gained much new ground. There can also be no doubt that LSSP control of these Urban Councils will have important repercussions elsewhere.

The trend towards the LSSP shown above is also shown clearly in the Parliamentary constituencies held by the LSSP.

In Moratuwa, whose MP is now a dissident, the Left already had control in the last Council. There were 4 LSSPers; one LSSP sympathiser, and one CPer. All these six held their seats, although two LSSPers had meanwhile joined the Stali-

1954 Local Government Elections

	No. of seats Contested	No. of seats Won	No. of seats held in previous Council
<i>Kalutara U. C.</i>			
LSSP	5	4	1
Stalinist Front	1	1	0
<i>Panadura U. G.</i>			
LSSP	3	2	0
Stalinist Front	2	2	0
<i>Moratuwa U. C.</i>			
LSSP	7	5	3
Stalinist Front	3	3	3
<i>Kotte U. C.</i>			
LSSP	5	0	0
Stalinist Front	3	2	0
<i>Dehiwala-Mt. U. C.</i>			
LSSP	8	4	2
Stalinist Front	2	1	1
<i>Negombo M. C.</i>			
LSSP	2	0	0
Stalinist Front	2	0	3
<i>Badulla U. C.</i>			
LSSP	4	4	1
Stalinist Front	1	0	0

<i>Kegalle U. C.</i>			
LSSP	1	1	1
Stalinist Front	1	0	0
<i>Hatton U. C.</i>			
LSSP	2	1	1
Stalinist Front	0	0	0
<i>Kandy M. C.</i>			
LSSP	2	0	0
Stalinist Front	3	0	0
<i>Total</i>			
LSSP	35	21	9
Stalinist Front	18	9	4
<i>Colombo M. C.</i>			
LSSP	10	6	5
Stalinist Front	15	6	5

nist Front. Besides, the LSSP won two more seats. The LSSP thus specifically improved its position against all its enemies in Moratuwa.

Badulla showed the same trend. Against the one LSSPer in the previous Council, we now have three Party members and a sympathiser. This group controls the Council and has elected Comrade Daya Gunasekera as chairman. This is the first time in Badulla's history that the UC has been Left-controlled; and this control has been won by the LSSP. (The only CPer, who fought in a front with us, lost.)

Kotte has not shown such startling progress as Moratuwa and Badulla. Nevertheless, two seats have been newly won by the Left in this Council where the Left had no seats at all previously. These two seats have been won by dissident LSSP-ers who went to the Stalinist Front. Both had been long well-known in the area as prominent LSSP-ers before they went away.

INFLUENCE OF THE GREAT HARTAL

The above results contrast sharply with the results in Negombo, Kegalle, Kandy and Hatton. In these towns, we have made no gains at all. (Neither has any other Left party.)

What is the political conclusion to be drawn from this contrast? Why have we made no gains in these four places?

Special reasons can no doubt be given for each place. Negombo Town, for instance, is a strongly Roman Catholic area. We have made some gains in the Village Committee elections in

these parts. In Kegalle, though we have done some work, we have never been able to build a proper Party group. In Kandy, several local factors have gone to the result. In Hatton, our strongest candidate chose a wrong ward. And so on.....

But, when all is said and done, some explanation more general to all four places seems to be called for. And there is such an explanation.

The most important fact about the six towns in which we have done well is that they fall within the Hartal areas. In or near each of them, the Hartal reached great heights.

On the other hand, the towns of Negombo, Kegalle, Kandy and Hatton did not go into Hartal action as, for instance, Moratuwa did. (This remark applies to Kandy fully despite the action of the University students on the day before the Hartal.)

It is thus clear that the Hartal has been a vital factor in the political education of the masses.

ELECTION VICTORIES REQUIRE PREVIOUS WORK & ORGANIZATION

The participation of the masses of a given area in the Hartal was, of course, not some accidental happening. On the contrary, it was very much pre-determined. Two main factors may be mentioned.

(1) The loss of an LSSP-held constituency undoubtedly played a great part in the radicalisation of the masses and in their political education. This is because the feeling of having been deceived was strong in such constituencies. As the financial crisis prophesied by us began to become manifest, this sense of having been cheated by the UNP became intensified and clarified; until, with the rise in the rice-price, it developed into positive anger against the UNP Government.

(2) Wherever the LSSP had worked long and systematically in the past and driven down genuine local roots, there tended to be mass participation in the Hartal under LSSP leadership. The thoroughness with which most of the Western Province and the Ambalangoda-Balapitiya constituency of the Southern Province was covered by the Hartal is explained by these two facts.

The above points to a further important conclusion. Party gains at elections have depended mainly on the extent to which the Party itself has taken root in an area and developed a strong organisation resting on sustained and systematic work

You cannot simply come in locally on some national wave of changed opinion. You must be in position organisationally, etc., to take advantage of any shift in public opinion.

Moreover and manifestly, public opinion itself does not shift uniformly everywhere. Here, too, there is un-even development. It is necessary, therefore, that the Party should not only take note of the fact of the change, but also seek to discover the **extent** and **distribution** of the change.

The true position disclosed by the election results seems to be that the Party has gained, perhaps decisively, in the politically advanced areas of the Island. In the rest of the Island, there is still no **pronounced** swing to us or to the Left generally.

VILLAGE COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

Let us check on the above conclusions from the Village Committee election results.

We are in no position to give precise figures regarding the V. C. elections held this year; but there is no question that the V.C. elections have shown an even more general trend towards the LSSP than the U.C. elections have shown. Everywhere we have increased our representation in the Village Committees, largely through the work of the Youth Leagues. Several Village Committees have newly come into our control, and in several more we are in a position of near-control because of the size and discipline of the group. In fact, our position in the Village Committees has improved in almost direct proportion to the length of time we have worked systematically in the area and to the extent that we had functioning organisations in an area previous to the election period. We have not usually been successful when there is only a sudden eruption of Samasamajism in an election area, un-connected with previous local work and dependent entirely on the national position of the Party.

LSSP VS STALINIST FRONT

Let us now study the position between the LSSP and the Stalinist Front.

The over-all position in the ten Councils we have so far been considering is that the Left has won 30 seats. This compares with 13 seats previously held by the Left; a gain of 17 seats.

Of the 30 seats held by the Left, as many as 21 are held by the LSSP. The Stalinist Front holds 9.

Within the Stalinist Front, the distribution is as follows—8 Philipists and one CPer. (The 8 Philipists fought as Sama-

samajists and Fronters, carefully avoiding any "taint" of "Communism". This fact has a significance for us, as we shall see.)

Even on the above figures, the dominance of the LSSP within the Left is clear. We hold more than twice the number of seats held by the Front.

But if we remember that many a Philipist was only a recent renegade from us and still held by the masses to be not particularly distinguishable from us, the sheer pre-dominance of the LSSP position among the Leftward-moving masses becomes clear beyond challenge.

There are also other ways, of course, of looking at the figures in order to study the distribution of forces within the Left.

Thus, of the 21 seats held by the LSSP, as many as 9, or about 45 per cent, represent gains. Of the Stalinist Front's 9 seats, 4 represent gains; which too is about the same percentage.

Further, all the Stalinist Front gains are by the Philipists; i. e., by the Samasamaja wing of the Stalinist Front. This points to an LSSP mass position stronger than is shown by the figures.

The gains of each side will be seen in better perspective from the following figures:

The LSSP put up 39 candidates (including 7 sympathisers). Of these, 21 (16 members, 5 sympathisers) won, i. e., success in about 53 per cent of the seats fought.

The Stalinist Front fought 19 seats and won 9, i. e., about 45 per cent.

In other words, we have grown faster than the Stalinist Front even though we started with a larger number of seats.

Further, all the newly-won seats of the Front and 8 out of the 9 seats won by it were won by the Samasamaja wing of the Front. The true growth of the LSSP is therefore obviously greater than the figures reflect.

The V. C. election results bear this out. It is the LSSP which has made all the large gains in the V. C. elections. The Stalinist Front has made very few gains in comparison with us here.

One feature which stands out in these elections is that the CP made no gains whatsoever. They have simply managed to hold the seat they have always held in the Moratuwa U. C.

This shows that the CP effort at eroding the position of the LSSP in these areas has not succeeded. What they have really gained is a number of dissident Samasamajists represented in the Stalinist Front. Some of these folk are no doubt virtual CPers.

THE LEFT FRONT QUESTION

The results can also be looked at in another way from the point of view of the Left: and that is from the angle of the united front question. What would have been the result if the Left parties could have gone into the elections mutually supporting each other? The answer can be short. The victory of the Left would have been overwhelming. Such is the loss to the people from the Stalinist Front's refusal to come to an agreement with the LSSP! Such is the outcome of their determination to treat the LSSP, and not the UNP, as the main enemy!

COLOMBO

Colombo, which we have kept to the last as a special case, confirms our point on the united front powerfully. There is no doubt that a united front of the Left parties, based on mutual support, could have won at least five more seats, thus ensuring the Left an overwhelming majority. Instead, we had the Stalinist Fronters openly working against our candidates everywhere, without exception; out to have the LSSP defeated even at the cost of UNP victories in order to show Stalinism as the leading Left force in Colombo.

Fortunately, the Stalinist effort failed; although it nearly gave the UNP control of the Council. There were only 15 declared Leftists against 16 declared Rightists in the new Council; and it is only the dominance of N. M. as a national figure of the LSSP which enabled one of these 16 to be won over and for Left control to be ensured.

The Colombo results merit comment from several points of view.

Firstly, the closely balanced position between Left and Right in the Council certainly does not reflect the position in the wards. The Council reflects the balance between a united Right and a **divided** Left.

Secondly, though the number of seats held by the LSSP and the Stalinist Front are equal, the position is not quite as it appears.

To begin with, two of the CP members received less than half the total polled vote. This applies to only one LSSP member.

Again, the LSSPers won, not only without CP support, but also against both covert and open CP opposition. On the other hand, the LSSPers in Stalinist wards went out and worked whole-heartedly for their candidates.

Above all, the Stalinist Front threw in a far larger number of candidates than the LSSP. They put up 16 Party candidates; we put up 10. Of their 16, six, or about 47 per cent, won. Of our ten, too, 6, or 60 percent, won.

Again, though each of us gained only one seat on balance, our gain is one out of five; theirs is only one out of eleven.

Thus Colombo too confirms the dominance of the LSSP within the Left, though the dominance here does not amount to the same pre-dominance we found in the other areas we have studied. What is more, the LSSP has achieved all this "against the world".

No wonder there is visible disintegration of the Stalinist Front since these elections! The class-struggle line of the LSSP is obviously drawing the masses as the class-collaboration of the Stalinist Front cannot. The united front of the Left parties in action against the capitalists may therefore be nearer than many think. The LSSP is well set to take the offensive on all fronts!

This article was written for **Samasamaja Pahana**, Sinhalese theoretical journal of the LSSP.