

PREPARATIONS FOR THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN INDIA

PERHAPS the most spectacular elections in history are now taking place in India. These are the first general elections since the attainment of independence on August 15, 1947. The vast proportions of this democratic enterprise stagger the imagination.

India, the most populous country in the world, barring China, has 175,000,000 prospective voters—more than 12 times the total population of Canada, yet only about one-half that of India herself. It is said that when he was President of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, now President of the Republic of India, once amused himself calculating the thickness of the Indian electoral roll if printed 40 names per foolscap page with the pages bound together. He arrived at the figure of approximately 600 feet! Almost 2,000,000 specially designed steel ballot boxes have been constructed to receive the votes which will elect over 4,000 representatives to the legislative bodies at the centre and in the various states. It will cost India over ten million rupees (\$2,142,000) to keep inviolate the secrecy of the ballot. As a result of extremes of weather conditions prevailing at any given time in the various regions in the huge diamond-shaped sub-continent stretching some 2,000 miles from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, and because in India nothing is ever voluntarily allowed to interfere with agricultural operations, four months will be required to complete this gigantic poll, the final results of which may not be known until February 1952.

The four years since independence have been barely sufficient to lay the foundations for the elections. During that period the mosaic of internal political divisions inherited at partition has been transformed; a constitution embodying the principles of democratic freedom has been created, and legislation to govern the host of administrative details, without which an election cannot take place, has been put into force. A census has been taken, constituencies have been delimited; electoral rolls prepared, election officials trained, and an effort has been made to coach the millions of men and women who will vote for the first time under universal adult suffrage. Radio, the press and public addresses have been used, and in many areas, where no election has ever taken place, mock-elections have been held to demonstrate the technique of voting.

The States of India

It has not been an easy matter to devise election procedures to ensure a minimum of confusion on the part of the voters, many of whom have never cast a ballot before and most of whom are illiterate. This task has been additionally complicated by the political composition of the country. India, now that the hard process of merging and reshaping internal political divisions has virtually been completed, consists of 28 component parts divided by the constitution into Part "A", Part "B" and Part "C" states.

For all practical purposes, the nine Part "A" states are the old governors' provinces of the pre-independence period. These have provincial popular governments. The eight Part "B" states were formed out of the bulk of the area comprised in "Indian" India—that is, the territories ruled by the Indian princes at the time of partition. These already have, or will shortly have, popular governments with *rajpramukhs* (former princes corresponding to governors) at the head, and with local cabinets and elected legislatures. Finally, there are eleven Part "C" states under the direct control of the central government through chief commissioners. Since the bringing