

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru

Volume 32

Reference on Pondicherry

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Election of the Leader in Pondicherry Assembly Congress¹

I discussed this matter² with Shri Kamaraj Nadar, Chief Minister of Madras. The Horne Minister was also present. (In fact as this was to some extent an organisational matter for the Congress, I mentioned it to the Congress Central Parliamentary Board meeting.)

In view of the past background of Mr Goubert³ and other facts which have been brought before our notice,⁴ none of us was very happy at the prospect of Mr Goubert being chosen as Leader. But in view of the great majority of the members of the Party in Pondicherry supporting him for leadership, we

¹ Note to the Foreign Secretary, New Delhi, 15 April 1956. JN Collection.

² Election of a new leader of the Pondicherry Assembly Congress Party was to be held after the death of the earlier incumbent, Pakkiriswami Pillai.

³ Edouard Goubert (1894-1979); a French Indian Creole, called himself Goubert Pillai in later years; lawyer, participated in the First World War; served as a Magistrate in French India; member, Representative Assembly, Pondicherry, Councillor of the Government and first Deputy to the Mayor, 1946; member, French National Assembly, Paris, 1951; was stripped of his parliamentary position and immunity on 30 March 1954 following his support to merger; member, Representative Assembly, Pondicherry, 1955 and 1959, elected leader, Pondicherry Assembly Congress Party, 1956; Mayor, Pondicherry, 1961; Chief Minister of Union Territory of Pondicherry, 1963-64; reelected member of the Legislative Assembly.

⁴ Later investigations into his financial activities revealed that Goubert had used his position to his advantage, like salary double-dipping, embezzlement of liquor revenue, and gold, diamond and mercury smuggling.

were clearly of opinion that we should allow the Party to make its own choice of Leader. If it wishes to choose Mr Goubert, it can do so. Normally, at such Party meetings some representative of the Pradesh Congress Committee or the AICC is present. But in the present case we do not propose to send anyone there for this purpose. We want to leave the choice entirely to the Party meeting in Pondicherry without any influence from outside. Also we do not wish to be directly associated with the responsibility of Mr Goubert's elections.

Will you please, therefore, inform our Chief Commissioner, Kewal Singh, immediately by telephone or telegram (preferably by telephone but to be followed up by telegram) of this decision of ours? He should inform Mr Goubert who is at present the Deputy Leader of the Congress Party as well as the Secretary of the Party, whoever he might be that it is open to the Party to meet as soon as convenient and choose a Leader.

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To K. Kamaraj Nadar⁵

New Delhi

24 April 1956

My dear Kamaraj,⁶

After my talk with you here, I informed the Chief Commissioner of Pondicherry that the Congress Party there could elect their own leader whoever they chose.

This was done and Goubert was elected.⁷

⁵ JN Collection

⁶ Chief Minister of Madras

After that, as you know, five members of the Congress Party decided to leave the Party and join the Opposition. This has naturally created a new situation and there is a possibility of Goubert being defeated in the Assembly.⁸

I gather that the Chief Commissioner saw you in this connection and that you stated that the only solution you could think of was for Goubert to resign from the leadership and for the dissident Congress members to return to the Congress Party in the Assembly.⁹ Since then other developments have taken place and are daily occurring.¹⁰ I have sent a

⁷ Pondicherry Assembly Congress Party elected Goubert their leader on 20 April unanimously. R.L. Purushothama Reddiar, President of the Pondicherry Representative Assembly, and four other Congress members abstained from the meeting

⁸ Kewal Singh, the Chief Commissioner, had telegraphed that five dissident members were determined to overthrow the Congress Government in the Pondicherry Assembly. V. Subbiah, leader of the People's Front in the Assembly, had promised full support to Purushothama Reddiar in forming an alternative government. The party position in the 39-member Assembly was as follows: Congress-19, People's Front-15, Congress dissidents-5. Goubert and his supporters suspected that this was being done under instructions from some neighbouring Congress leaders to teach the Pondicherry Congress Party a lesson

⁹ On 23 April Kewal Singh suggested to Kamaraj to give suitable advice to the five dissidents in the interests of the unity of the party and stability of the Government. He also suggested postponement of any drastic reorganisation of Pondicherry Congress till after the de jure transfer of the French Indian territories. K.V.S. Krishnan, Vice-President, T.N.C.C., had also written on 14 April to Nehru criticising Kamaraj's ways both in Madras and Pondicherry

¹⁰ On 23 April, on receiving a communication from the Chief Commissioner for election of the sixth Councillor, the leader of the Opposition, Subbiah, wanted 24-hour notice. But Goubert demanded immediate election, failing which he said, he would move no-confidence motion against the President of the Assembly. The Assembly was adjourned sine die and the President and all Opposition walked out. However, Goubert and his supporters, 20 in number, continued the meeting, carried the no-confidence motion, and elected a new President and the sixth Councillor. On 27 April, Subbiah appealed to the Chief Commissioner to declare this "reported" session null and void.

message to the Chief Commissioner that he should allow matters to take their course and should not interfere. If Goubert is defeated, we should accept the defeat in the natural course. I do not think it will be wise or right to bring pressure on Goubert to resign to please the five dissident members. This kind of changing tactics seldom pays. Also I think it would be wrong for us to show that we are frightened by the action of the five dissident members. If they can join the Opposition, then they should have no sympathy from us at all. To please them we should not go against all rules of our own discipline.

I am told that these five dissident members go about saying that they have the support of the Tamil Nad PCC. I am sure this cannot be true. I hope you will make this quite dear to them and to the people in Pondicherry.

Otherwise our whole discipline and organisation will go to pieces.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

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Letters to Chief Ministers

14 March 1956

5. The work on the reorganisation of states has been greatly delayed. We have at last arrived at the stage of finalising the Bill and circulating it to the States. It is a happy omen that the difficult and ticklish question of the Punjab has been settled more or less satisfactorily. In fact, most of the problems we have had to face have been settled with a large measure of consent of the people concerned. Unhappily the question of Bombay and Maharashtra has led to a great deal of ill will and conflict. It must be our

endeavour to remove this ill will and restore normal conditions. No solution is a satisfactory one if it leaves a trail of bitterness and frustration behind.

6. The new proposal of a union of Bihar and West Bengal has led to a great deal of controversy and has caused some excitement.⁶ I understand that the proposed Bill for Reorganisation will not deal with Bengal and Bihar. A separate Bill will have to be brought later for this purpose.

8. During the last few days, we have had visits from three Foreign Ministers, Mr Selwyn Lloyd of the UK, Mr Dulles of the USA and M. Pineau of France. These visits more or less coincided with the meeting of the SEATO Council in Karachi where an extraordinary reference was made to Kashmir as well as to the Durand Line.⁷ I had long talks with all these Foreign Ministers and, even though we did not agree about many matters, I think our position was explained to them fully and frankly. The area of disagreement was largest with Mr Dulles and smallest with M. Pineau. Indeed, I was agreeably surprised to find how much there was in common between our approach to many international problems and that of M. Pineau. Incidentally, his visit here helped us to put finishing touches to the proposed treaty relating to Pondicherry etc.