

MAURITIUS

Date of Elections: December 20, 1976

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of Parliament. Previous general elections took place in 1967, the life of Parliament having in November 1969 been extended until 1976.

Characteristics of Parliament

The unicameral Parliament of Mauritius, the Legislative Assembly, comprises 70 members: 62 members elected by universal adult suffrage and 8 "additional" members (the most successful losing candidates) appointed by an electoral commission to balance the representation of ethnic communities in Parliament. The term of the Assembly is 5 years.

Electoral System

All British Commonwealth citizens aged 18 or more who have either resided in Mauritius for not less than two years or are domiciled and resident in the country on a prescribed date may be registered as electors in their constituency. Not entitled to be registered, however, are the insane, persons guilty of electoral offences, and persons under sentence of death or serving a sentence of imprisonment exceeding 12 months.

Electoral registers are revised annually. Proxy voting is allowed for members of the police forces and election officers on duty during election day, as well as for any duly nominated candidates.

Candidates for the Legislative Assembly must be British Commonwealth citizens of not less than 18 years of age who have resided in Mauritius for a period of at least two years before the date of their nomination (and for six months immediately before that date) and who are able to speak and read the English language with a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable them to take an active part in the proceedings of the Assembly.

Disqualified are persons owing allegiance to a State outside the Commonwealth, public officers or local government officers, undisclosed government contractors, undischarged bankrupts, persons under sentence of death or serving a sentence of imprisonment exceeding 12 months, and persons guilty

of electoral offences. The Speaker or Deputy Speaker may not be a Minister or Parliamentary Secretary.

For electoral purposes, the island of Mauritius is divided into 20 three-member constituencies; the island of Rodrigues for its part returns two members. Deputies are chosen according to a party-list system by simple majority vote, the three candidates (except for Rodrigues) receiving the largest number of votes being declared elected. Each elector has three votes.

As mentioned above, the unsuccessful candidates with the highest number of votes are designated by an electoral commission as the eight " additional " members of the Assembly.

By-elections are held to fill constituency seats of the Assembly which fall vacant between general elections.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

Parliament was dissolved on October 21, 1976, and on November 4 the date was announced for the first general elections since Mauritius achieved independence in March 1968. Although elections were due to take place every five years, the last one was held in August 1967, the term of the Legislative Assembly having in November 1969 been extended until 1976. A national state of emergency had been imposed in December 1971; the ban on political meetings was lifted on November 25, 1976.

The elections were contested by approximately 400 candidates representing 31 different parties, but only three of these nominated candidates in all 20 constituencies on the island of Mauritius — the Independence Party, an alliance of the Labour Party, headed by outgoing Prime Minister Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, and the Muslim Action Committee; the right-wing *Parti mauricien social-democrate* (PMSD); and the opposition left-wing *Mouveme.nl militant mauricien* (MMM), led by Mr. Paul Berenger. Government candidates campaigned on the theme of development and stability; the MMM called, *inter alia*, for nationalization of sugar factories and increased worker participation in management.

Election results gave the MMM 30 seats, the Independence Party 25 and the PMSD seven. Allocation of the eight supplementary seats resulted in the distribution shown below.

The MMM thus became the leading party in Parliament but just missed gaining an absolute majority. A coalition Independence-PMSD Government, with the former Prime Minister continuing in office, was announced on December 28.

