

Behind the sweeping

The resounding electoral triumph of Congress (R) has thoroughly confounded Mrs. Gandhi's critics and demoralised opposition leaders, who, only the other day, were prophesying the utter rout of the Ruling Congress. The realities of the changing situation must be truly galling to Mrs. Gandhi's critics.

Until quite recently we have had a continuous flow of ominous forebodings of instability, further fragmentation of party politics, economic degradation and even a break-up of the Government. In the middle of the election campaigns, not unnaturally, this flow turned into a torrent. In the event nothing of the kind has happened.

Far from being wrecked, the Ruling Congress has come through the ordeal as hale and hearty as it once was in the hey-day of Nehru. No longer can it be derided as a farce, a rump and a fiction. If reality there is, it is that the Congress today has recaptured its glorious image as the largest—and now perhaps the only—national party. For Mrs. Gandhi who has witnessed four excellent monsoons, the success at the polls is almost akin to another bumper harvest. For it was she who took the plunge daringly, spearheaded the national campaign gamely and literally carried her not too well-knit organisation on her shoulders.

Many factors, some positive and some negative, contributed to the utter rout of the opposition alliance, reducing some parties to the status of nonentities.

One factor was the character of a snap poll, which has all the elements of surprise, but decidedly tilts the balance of advantage emanating from choice and timing in favour of the Ruling party.

Secondly, the short period of campaign thwarted any massive organised effort, including mobilisation of resources, and rendered well-nigh impossible the kind of direct personal contacts between the candidates and the constituents which ensure rapport and votes. Every candidate has had to contend, on an average, with a million constituents, mostly far-flung!

MISALLIANCE

The third factor of significance was the decision of some of the opposition parties to forge an alliance to fight Mrs. Gandhi. In the event, the alliance became a misalliance, and where it was not so, it looked patently opportunistic to the average voter who shied away from the negative propaganda of some parties bordering at times on calumny.

The opposition parties were also wrong in assuming that the society at large was un-

changing, and that it disfavoured new ideas. Voters are also mature and know their minds. Since almost one-half or more of the voters can be categorised as young people, their pattern of voting would probably appear to be more uninhibited in character and in favour of change.

Another factor in favour of the Ruling Congress was the continued prosperity of the agriculturist: better yields, and higher incomes, sustained partly by price support measures, which have all opened up new vistas of change to the rural society. In the urban areas, too, the wage concessions, social security measures and other governmental initiatives must be counted as factors in the ultimate reckoning.

A feature in the poll that is worth mentioning is the resounding vote of the poor, casteless and others in the low-income groups, all

—as, for example, on the issue of assurances were forthcoming. The privy purses issue provided her call to defeat vestiges of yet, she could appear to be carry conviction that expropriation of wealth and property was

None in the opposition party this sweep, or even come of pledges and promises because of semblance of confidence of the lone exception was the J had its own platform, an eff and youthful leadership. But victims of the misalliance in so was swamped in places and the alliance became a liability elsewhere. Mr. Minoo Masani has him the so-called grand alliance has the defeat of some of the opposition including himself.

This election was noteworthy many prominent business men the fray. If you cannot convert is, an old saying. And business had many complaints against the legislation is enacted and 'comple' presumably felt that they should Parliament. Yet, the vote has jected this strategy, and most defeated by large margins at

By

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of which appear to have solidly voted for Mrs. Gandhi and her party. This was essentially the vote of the have-nots and it went for Mrs. Gandhi's promise of a better tomorrow.

The fact remains that the Ruling Congress was the only party which was led by a person who had developed a charisma, the image and the consummate political skill necessary to win an election. Other parties did not have Mrs. Gandhi and none had a chance of asserting any record or effort for popular appeal. The phalanx on the opposite side misread their own prejudices and even mistook them for popular opinion. Hence they banked heavily on a massive assault on Mrs. Gandhi's image, one which was destined to misfire, and did so.

THE PORTENTS

The success of the Ruling Congress in the series of by-elections that preceded this month's general elections should have been a pointer to all concerned. For one reason or another, the opposition parties preferred to minimise the significance of the Ruling Congress party's run of successes, though to shrewd observers, even the defeat of Mr. T. N. Singh at Maniram carried its own signal.

Mrs. Gandhi shrewdly beamed her campaign on the theme of economic development, modernisation, socialism and a changing age. Her techniques and style measured closely to popular expectations. Not for her the old battle cries; the controversial and combustible issues were sidetracked or glossed over, and where necessary

POLARISATION

An interesting outcome of it is the unobtrusive termination of political polarisation, which not 1969. The Ruling Congress, as once again becomes a huge player always was with multi-groups, lobbies, ideologues and PSP with which the Ruling Congress sought an adjustment has been out. The SSP has also taken with some giant tragedies. They have also been laid low.

Democracy thrives on dissent of the opposition parties. A land the ruling party with a grossly fragmentation into small units conducive to a lively system of check and vigilance. Against this, some of the turbulent elements (defeat) is bound to make the sober and responsible and it may adopt a constructive approach discussions. Besides, with the Ruling Congress as a massive party diverse shades of opinion may forum for debate and inner-

In many ways, Mrs. Gandhi equals that of her father. She longer be haunted by the spect She gets one more opportunity

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the issue of property rights
thcoming to allay fears.
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inner-party democracy.

s. Gandhi's performance
her. She will now no
the spectre of survival.
ortunity to govern—and



government in the true sense of the term. She has
no need to tack and temporise, seek the line of
least resistance, opt for populist sops, make illu-
sory commitments. In fact, she has the chance
now to show the public the difference between
non-Government and Government, and fulfil the
hope of pulling India through its difficult period
and bring it back on to the rails of modernisation
and progress.

Mrs. Gandhi also has the opportunity of
making the Government powerful enough to
assert and thus unify the nation. Her case has
now real plausibility and the question is: Will
her plans and programme have it in equal mea-
sure? The resurgence of the Congress after the
long decline and the abrupt disintegration of 1969
should be an occasion for policy reorientation
and better party and Government management.

The unmistakable pro-Congress tide has al-
ready posed a threat to the loosely-tied UP Gov-
ernment as also the opposition Governments in
Orissa and Mysore and, in time, perhaps Bihar.
The battle is over; now is the time to give a
shape to the ideas and plans to provide a reason-
able income to the people, create more jobs, to
promote investment and production and make
economic and social change real and meaning-
ful to the millions who have pinned their faith
on the leadership.