

Gandhi victory hits World Bank

The former Prime Minister sweeps Chikmagalur elections

Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi stunned her detractors both inside and outside India with a sweeping victory this week in a southern Parliamentary by-election. Her campaign for a strong India, based on science and industry, produced a record turnout of 76 percent of the voters. According to final returns, she won her seat in Parliament with a margin of 75,000 votes total (450,068) over the ruling Janata Party's candidates.

Some Western observers, particularly those operating out of the City of London, are at a loss to evaluate this victory. The once effusively praised Indian voter who ousted the Gandhi government from power in 1977, has turned right around and brought her back. Now, as leader of the opposition, Gandhi has necessarily become the center of the growing multiparty effort against the implementation of the World Bank-Ford Foundation deindustrialization plans for India. The Janata Party ruralists, the linkage of black money and gold-smuggling to the stunting of India's development policies, figured prominently in Gandhi's campaign assault on Janata incompetence. Her victory in a state where she did not even speak the language (she is from northern India) has gone full measure toward reestablishing her as India's foremost politician with a national following.

International implications

Gandhi's victory has international significance. Her reemergence is a

defeat for the Janata ruralists; for Socialist International chairman Willy Brandt, whose Indian agent, George Fernandes, spearheaded the cultist campaign against her; for the Janata government's "genuine nonalignment" facade which has served to appease fascistic tendencies in neighboring Pakistan. In fact, forces there fighting to save Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto from the gallows have been remoralized by Gandhi's victory with hope that her leadership will produce sufficient pressure to save Bhutto's life. Bhutto like Gandhi is the symbol for regional detente and development.

The Chikmagalur constituency

The Chikmagalur state constituency and the Gandhi victory are unique in their contribution to a new geometry in Indian politics. At every rally, Gandhi spoke haltingly in English and Hindi, having this translated by state Chief Minister Devraj Urs into the regional language, Kannada. The crowds patiently waited and strove to understand the briefings on foreign policy, on the need for science and industry in agriculture, reminiscing that Gandhi's father Nehru similarly briefed them in the 1920s and 1930s to win India's freedom from the British. The campaign style was identical.

The sociology of the constituency lent itself to these "second freedom" efforts. It was Chikmagalur where the British East India Company took over

indigenous coffee production to convert it into backbreaking plantations manned by India's oppressed castes. At independence, the British transferred control to the "Brown Sahibs" (Brown Masters), who kept the lower castes in a continued state of backwardness. Gandhi and the Congress governments in the post-independence years have striven to break this social structure and the constituency fully backs the Congress Party.

Gandhi's platform and Fernandes's anti-Gandhi effort sharply clashed to the last days of campaigning. One of her first campaign gestures was placing the foundation stone for the south's first steel plant at Mangalore, a city close to Chikmagalur. Fernandes, on the other hand, urged on the population to the view that India's villages are beautiful and that cottage industries could once again flourish under his leadership! Gandhi projected herself as the candidate of the minorities and their rights. Fernandes ignored the volatile caste issue although across India there have been mass atrocities by upper castes against the lower castes, including burning-alive orgies and land dispossessions. One reliable observer branded the Janata campaign as "fascistic." Among the Janata posters were skulls dripping with blood next to photographs of Gandhi.

— Leela Narayan