

The Big Victory

IN WHAT WAS thought to be the most crucial election in two decades of the Republic, the people have returned a clear and unequivocal verdict. The Congress (R) under the inspiration and direction of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and its poll ally, the D.M.K., under the leadership of Mr. Karunanidhi, have swept the polls, to confound prophets and critics alike. The overwhelming strength that the Prime Minister has been given in the fifth Lok Sabha must have come as a pleasant surprise even to her, confident as she was of improving her position through what was considered by many a political gamble. Critical as we ourselves were of some of their policies and postures, we have no hesitation in hailing this unmistakably stupendous achievement of the Congress (R) and its poll ally. Nor do we flinch from owning up the error of our assessment of their electoral prospects. The landslide was of such a pattern, that, after the first 200 Lok Sabha results were known, the public could safely assume the full and final outcome.

What is outstanding in this mid-term poll is not merely the broad sweep of Mrs. Gandhi's triumph nor even the utter rout of the four-party alliance that sought to oust her from power. It is rather the ruthless demolition of all regional parties like the Shiv Sena, the B.K.D., the Akali Dal, etc. The two notable exceptions are the amazing victory of the D.M.K. in Tamil Nadu, which incidentally was the only one among them to be in alliance with the Congress (R) in addition to other parties, and the Telengana Praja Samiti which had openly expressed its later support to Mrs. Gandhi, though fighting her candidates in the elections. To those who were distressed by the emergence of regional pulls to the detriment of national unity, the new trend should be heartening. And from the nature of the wholly one-sided results, it seems safe to presume that what prevailed with millions of voters distributed in different parts of this vast sub-continent is the image of Mrs. Gandhi. That alone may account for even mediocre Congress (R) candidates winning decisively.

It is not as if the criticisms levelled against Mrs. Gandhi's political leadership were all baseless and mala fide. But she campaigned on the main plank of stability which, she skilfully argued, it was

only in her hands to provide and not in those of the conglomerate of four parties, somewhat dissimilar in outlook and what is more, not even able to produce an agreed common programme and an undisputed leader. One has to conclude that the prospect of this vast country, facing so many threats from within and without, going through a calamitous phase of instability moved many to plump for her party with a vengeance as it were. Nor has the cry of democracy in danger raised by the four-party alliance cut any ice with the millions steeped as they are in abysmal poverty. The same thing happened in Ceylon last year, when a similar slogan failed to save the well-entrenched United National Party from the onslaught of Mrs. Bandaranaike's United Front. Apparently, the masses in India also were less worried over the charge of totalitarianism laid against her than the more insistent demands of their sheer survival and sustenance. Her hectic campaigning and calculated shots at privilege and vested interests have obviously invested Mrs. Gandhi with a popular image that carried the day. She did give the impression to many during the past two years of going all out to wreck the stability that the undivided Congress seemed to have achieved earlier at least at the Centre. And her explanation for not fulfilling the pledges of the Congress to the people or even to contain the vicious lawlessness in States like West Bengal was that her style was cramped first by her restrictive older colleagues and later by her dependence for mere survival on miscellaneous parties like the communists, the Muslim League and perhaps the D.M.K. too. In their mysterious and cumulative wisdom, the people have answered her by squarely placing her in a position of great strength to redeem her promises. And by the way in which the marxists and the C.P.I. have been cut down to size, it appears as if the voters (the haves and the have-nots alike) have not a little been influenced by the centrist posture that Mrs. Gandhi took ever since the announcement of the mid-term poll and the low key in which she played her socialist tune. By wholly ridding the Congress (R) of its confusing dependence on left adventurists, the people obviously expect a dynamic but moderate and practical programme of action to deal with the mounting problems of a burgeoning population, widespread unemployment and economic stagnation. The responsibility to use the new strength wisely and well has now been placed on Mrs. Gandhi and her party.

As for Tamil Nadu where the D.M.K. has inflicted a crushing defeat on the democratic front led by Mr. Kamaraj, its majority in the State Assembly seems to have exceeded even its most optimistic expectations. A certain amount of dissatisfaction among sections of the people over the D.M.K. Government's policies and style of Government was certainly there and has been reflected in the not inconsiderable votes polled by the opposition front. But there is no mistaking the landslide sweep-back of the D.M.K. to power, in an even more convincing manner than in 1967. The comfortable food supplies during the entire four-year regime of the party may have had much to do with it. As also its purposeful strengthening of the organisational set-up at the grass-roots level and its association with Mrs. Gandhi's winning vein. But the party, we hope, will take note of the criticisms levelled against it during and before the election campaign and be constantly alive to public opinion, even if this belongs to only some sections of the people. The immense confidence placed in it by the electorate of Tamil Nadu calls in return for a vigorous effort to provide a clean administration without excessive party interference and the creation of a climate of harmony and orderliness so vital to the economic growth and prosperity of the State. An ugly scar has been left by the senseless violence and fatal clashes during the elections, a phenomenon hitherto unknown to Tamil Nadu, famed for its sense of decorum and tolerance of the opposite view. It is up to the victors and the vanquished alike to forget the unedifying interludes and work in a spirit of constructive co-operation. Elections come and go, but the people of Tamil Nadu have to live "as brothers" as they always have done.