

Gandhi Loses In Bid For Congress Party Presidency

Last week the special convention of the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) rejected a bid by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to regain the effective leadership of the Congress Party. The decision, as reflected in a compromise resolution whereby Gandhi retained a top position but not *the* top position, did not come easily. The two-day convention was marred by public brawls within the party with evidence mounting that while Gandhi made her bid against the wishes of other top party leaders, her "lobbyists" were her son Sanjay's mafia, the hated implementors of the state of emergency under her rule.

The Congress Party's special convention preceded by weeks the annual conference of the ruling Janata Party in Ahmedabad, where it is believed that two items will top the agenda — how to deal with Home Minister Charan Singh's brash activities including Gandhi's arrest and how to present the nation with a coherent economic program. The Congress Party faces the same two problems with an added complication: all indications are that Mrs. Gandhi has not gone into a political offensive, but is nevertheless willing to split the party if that becomes necessary to maintain control of it.

A lead article in the progressive weekly *New Wave* of Oct. 9 describes the real battle underlying the party infighting: "Events during the past few weeks culminating in the sudden arrest of Indira Gandhi triggering country-wide protests, strikes, and demonstrations have once again forced the key issue of the decade on the agenda: Will the forces hostile to India's industrial development and its emergence as a stable and strong nation in South Asia leave India alone to sort out its internal problems in a democratic and peaceful manner?"

Whither Congress?

The drama around the arrest of Indira Gandhi, her unconditional release, and her subsequent intensive campaign to force the Janata government to back down has in fact brought about the crisis inside her party as well as in the Janata. This has been the case because most of the Janata leaders themselves identify with the Congress Party's leadership during the country's independence struggle and remain at heart a 'Congressite' tendency. This layer in the Janata, led by Defense Minister Jagjivan Ram, party chairman Chandra Shekar, and Petroleum Minister Bahuguna, is known to have been strongly opposed to the Gandhi arrest. Late reports indicate that this group, with some support from other layers of the Janata (in particular the right-wing Jan Sangh tendency, which is trying to take full organizational control of the Janata), is pressing Prime

Minister Desai to take over the Home Ministry, not only to clear out Charan Singh but also to give a "moral cleansing" to the Home Ministry.

In recent weeks, widespread violence has erupted in the countryside, where landlords have been killing landless laborers and untouchables. Throughout the press, blame for this violence has been laid to the Home Ministry, for failing to use its powers to force law administration officials in the states to intervene. On all these controversial cases, Desai's position has been the legally correct one — allow the judiciary to decide who is guilty and who is not. Unfortunately, this has *not* been the position of Home Minister Singh, whose ministry, in the wake of Gandhi's arrest, has started a campaign of black propaganda and press censorship against progressives inside not only the Congress but the Janata Party as well. *New Wave* reported Oct. 7: "Symptomatic of the deepening crisis is an oral order to the television not to give any publicity to Petroleum Minister H. Bahuguna and also to play up the anti-Sathpathy news." (Nardiri Sathpathy is a Janata executive committee member under investigation on "corruption" charges.)

While the Gandhi arrest is looked at as a bungled affair discrediting the Janata government, the provocations by Singh have provided a valuable opportunity for Gandhi to strike back both at the government and at the Congress Party as well. Widely recognized as at her shrewdest in internal party maneuverings, Gandhi has decided to go all the way without clearing the record of the state of emergency period. At the special party conference last weekend a systematic campaign to denigrate the existing party leadership was undertaken by Gandhi supporters. A chief Gandhi lobbyist, Chief Minister Devraj Urs began a major campaign to win support for Gandhi by slandering other leaders. Gandhi's own speech was far from support for the party that had rallied behind her during her recent crisis.

Gandhi herself commands widespread support at the mass level and even within the party, and many would see any move by her to sever ties with son Sanjay's "caucus" as the door to a new role in her party. But no such signs are evident at this time.

For the Congress to give the "caucus" any position of power is an insult to the electorate of India, contends much of the party. This leaves Gandhi only two choices: split the party, or abide by the party dictates. Gandhi herself has given only very ambiguous hints on her next two moves. She has stated that the day she would leave the party is when the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi were violated. Interestingly, she failed to mention the world-

view of Jawharlal Nehru, her father and India's first prime minister, whose policies for industrial development and growth are the real issues under attack.

Indian Press Rejects Singh Arrest Of Gandhi

The following sampling characterizes press reactions of major Indian newspapers to the arrest of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi two weeks ago. The excerpts reflect both regional and political differences across the country. New Wave represents progrowth tendencies inside the Congress Party, the ruling Janata Party, and the Communist Parties, while uniquely providing a multiparty analysis. The Patriot is known to be closer to the Communist Party of India (CPI) and is considered pro-Soviet. The Times of India, one of the largest circulation papers in the country, is financed by big business houses and reflects perhaps most closely the reaction of business to the arrest. Two major businessmen, K.K. Birla and R.K. Goenka were also arrested. The Hindustan Times is known to get large funding from the Birla family. The Hindu is a southern newspaper, and reflects sentiment in south India where the Congress Party largely remains in power at the state level. Lastly, the National Herald, a paper founded by former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (Indira Gandhi's father) is closest to left-wing and centrist tendencies in the Congress Party.

The Patriot, Oct. 5:

Mrs. Gandhi may have erred during the last months of the emergency in many ways. She was instrumental in bringing into being an extra-constitutional center of authority and power at the center. For this she has been judged by the people and she accepted what happened to her and her party as just punishment. What has followed since the Janata government came to power is more political vindictiveness and vendetta than reasoned judgement and punishment. Public opinion in many parts of the country sees it thus and is once again swinging in Mrs. Gandhi's favor.

Times of India, Oct. 5:

Mrs. Indira Gandhi's unconditional release by the court has seriously undermined the credibility of the Janata government in the eyes of the public. It is difficult to dispell the impression that it arrested the former Prime Minister on unsubstantiated charges. The pertinent point is that the Home Minister (Charan Singh) and other officials cannot now deny that in so crucial a decision the elemental precaution of ensuring charges against her were fool proof was not taken.

The Hindu, Oct. 5:

It remains to be seen if Mrs. Gandhi is going to choose her words carefully in attacking the Janata Party policies or accusing the government of a political vendetta.

The National Herald, Oct. 5:

This is not democracy; this is a page from the Dark Ages.... By releasing Indira Gandhi the government

acknowledged their fear of the people. It is not sufficient atonement. It is Mr. Charan Singh's turn to make his individual atonement by resigning as soon as possible and going back to his usual activities in Rohikkand. He has done enough damage to the Janata Government and the Janata Party.

The Hindustan Times, A Scandalous Bungle, Oct. 5:

Indeed, the charitable view of the entire train of events would be that decisions were taken and implemented in haste.

New Wave:

'Charan's Coup Against Janata'

On October 3, Choudhury Charan Singh staged a veritable anti-Janata coup, the third in succession in the sub-continent during the week. The arrest of Indira Gandhi and four former Union Ministers on "flimsy charges" seemed to be in line with Pakistani fuhrer General Ziaul Haq's indefinite postponement of elections and the deliberately provoked revolt of patriotic men and officers of the Bangladesh army. The results, too, will not be different.

The arrest of Indira Gandhi has been decried throughout the country as "politically motivated" and "highly vindictive". That this description corresponds to the public sentiment is evident from the hero's welcome she received at Agra 24 hours earlier on October 2. Nearly a quarter million people who turned up to hear Indira Gandhi — not to see how she looks as Charan Singh would like the people to believe — reflected the fast growing disenchantment with the Janata rule. A few days earlier a mammoth gathering on the lawns on Kanpur's Phool Bagh had "responsively" heard Indira Gandhi's indictment of the Janata government....

Charan Singh in a written statement referred to the "will of the nation" and the "imperatives of political morality" as the motive behind Indira Gandhi's arrest. When pointedly asked if he would submit his resignation if the court did not find the former Prime Minister guilty, Charan Singh promptly replied: "Why should I resign? The government files hundreds of cases. It wins some and loses others." He had no answer when he was reminded of the "imperatives of political morality."...

By indulging in political vindictiveness the Janata government is repaying the debt it owes to Indira Gandhi but for whose self-centered arrogance of power the tribe of political dropouts would not have acquired ministerial chairs in New Delhi. Apart from its own lack of commitment to this nation's economic and cultural advance, the Janata's offensive against secularism, science, technology and industry has already alienated it from the forward looking national social forces.

Instead of fighting Indira Gandhi on the political plane the Janata has resorted to the same techniques that the former Prime Minister used to meet economic and political challenges, namely, unabashed recourse to power and misuse of the state apparatus. This has begun to boomerang as in March last...