

GSA-28

India: The Second Succession

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Dear Dick,

For the second time in 18 months India has chosen a new Prime Minister--after having had one Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru, for its first 17 years as an independent nation. The succession of one government by another took place as smoothly this time as it did in June 1964. Both events were fascinating in themselves and significant in the development of Indian politics, last week's being perhaps the more meaningful of the two.

Day By Day

Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri died at 1:32 a.m. on 11 January, within hours of signing the now famous 'Tashkent Agreement'. Delhi received the news of his death shortly thereafter and the Home Minister, G.L. Nanda was sworn in as Prime Minister by President Radhakrishnan, just as he had been the afternoon of the day Nehru died. Sworn in with him were Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Minister of Information and Broadcasting and Nehru's daughter, and Sachin Chaudhury, the Minister of Finance--newly come to the office to replace the ousted T.T. Krishnamachari. About dawn most of the remaining ministers were sworn in, all continuing to hold their same portfolios. The newspapers arrived an hour late that morning, but Nancy and I heard the news over the radio as we drank our early-morning tea. Only one of the four daily papers we read called Nanda an 'acting' Prime Minister and all expressed shock and regret at the death of a man who had become, their editorials and news columns said, a Prime Minister of ability and stature. At 3 p.m. Shastri's body, accompanied by Prime Minister Kosygin, arrived at Palam airport on board a Russian plane and was driven through ever-growing crowds to what had been his house. Almost unnoticed, K. Kamaraj, the president of the Congress Party, arrived in Delhi from his home state of Madras and met Prime Minister Nanda.

The next morning, Wednesday, at 9:30, after lying in state during the night to be visited by thousands of people, Shastri's body was taken to the cremation ground on the banks of the Jumna River a short distance north of the spots hallowed by the cremations of Nehru and Gandhi. That afternoon at a huge park in the city, leaders of government and politics and representatives of foreign nations, including Kosygin and Vice-President Humphrey, spoke in praise of Shastri.

During the afternoon, too, work on the matter of succession began. The major actors in the drama began visiting and consulting with one

another, and, symptomatically, nearly everyone seemed to be visiting the house of Congress President Kamaraj. By nightfall the names of all the obvious candidates for Prime Minister were on everyone's lips: Nanda, the Prime Minister at least 'pro tem', Mrs. Gandhi, Morarji Desai, another long-time Congressman and former Finance Minister who had been passed over in favor of Shastri after Nehru's death, and Y.B. Chavan, Defense Minister and former chief minister of Maharashtra state. Also mentioned, but not with much seriousness for a variety of reasons, were Kamaraj, S.K. Patil, Minister of Railways and former Congress boss of Bombay state, and Sanjiva Reddy, Minister of Steel Mines and Heavy Industry, and virtual boss of Congress politics in Andhra state. The sweepstakes, the painstaking analysis of personalities and forces by observers, and the task of preserving continuous constitutional parliamentary government in India had begun.

The next day, the 13th of January, Thursday, was one of hurrys and furious consultations. Kamaraj was reported as still hopeful that the Prime Minister would be chosen by consensus--meaning unanimity or near-unanimity, the means by which Indians, and no less the Congressmen, like to reach important decisions. The day before, it had been rumored that Kamaraj and many of the Chief Ministers of the states were in favor of decision by consensus, but there was also said to be strong sentiment against this. It seemed, as would later be proved, that the need for consensus was not felt so strongly as it had been in June 1964 and in earlier years. Thursday the idea was mooted that consensus might be achieved by putting Kamaraj forward as a candidate. Several Chief Ministers from eastern India, allegedly at the behest of Atulya Ghosh, the boss of Bengal's political machine, were reportedly behind this move. Uncharitable motives were ascribed to Ghosh, such as wanting to place Kamaraj in an exposed position as a public figure where criticism might destroy him, thus enhancing Ghosh's power in the party and the nation. If the idea was in fact put forward, Kamaraj pushed it back again. He stayed out of the race as a candidate, preserving his great power as an unself-seeking negotiator. It was also reported, and not necessarily in contradiction to the story above, that Ghosh and the other members of the so-called 'syndicate' were in favor of Nanda as Prime Minister because, it was alleged, he would be weak and confused enough for them to manage. The syndicate consisted of Ghosh, Sanjiva Reddy, S.K. Patil, and, perhaps, a hanger-on, S. Nijalingappa, Chief Minister of Mysore. The syndicate was born at the time of the Nehru succession and supported Shastri, whom it may also have hoped to make its pawn. In June 1964 Kamaraj was said to be part of the syndicate, but if so he soon broke away from it, using it when possible rather than cooperating with it.

Thursday's rumors also said that two persons, probably Nanda and Morarji Desai, had decided to stand firm as candidates, thereby forcing an election in the Congress Parliamentary Party for its leadership-- which, of course, is synonymous with the Prime Ministership. Desai's followers were reported by The Times of India to be openly calling for the choice of the Parliamentary Party leader by "a free and unfettered vote". This suggestion was not unpleasing to many persons in the Parliamentary Party who disliked being a rubber stamp for decisions taken by the Congress as a whole, by the 'organizational wing' (instead of the 'government wing') of the party. The question of decision by consensus or ballot by the Parliamentary Party, however, was more than a matter of principle; it

would likely affect the fortunes of the candidates. Should the decision be made by vote, according to observers, Desai's chances were good, Nanda's chances were nil, and the chances of other possible candidates like Chavan or Mrs. Gandhi were less good than if the choice were to be made behind the scenes by consensus within the Congress as a whole. Thursday night some observers put Nanda as front runner, while others put their money on Chavan as the most likely choice if Desai persisted in demanding a vote. Clearly there were two races: the great contest for the leadership of the Parliamentary Party or the Prime Ministership (with Desai as a declared candidate), and the race within the Congress for the selection of a candidate who could defeat Desai, the party's maverick. If the right person won the second race it might pre-determine the outcome of the first.

Friday, the 14th, the hurryings and scurryings continued. The Congress Working Committee--the standing executive body of the party--met in the morning. Present as members of the committee were all the main actors in the drama, including Ghosh, Mrs. Gandhi, Kamaraj, Desai, Patil, Nanda, Chavan, Reddy, plus ten other members, and, by special invitation, nine more persons, among them the leaders and secretaries of the Congress Parliamentary Party and T.T. Krishnamachari, and C. Subramaniam, the

## THOUGHT FOR TODAY



Kamaraj the Meditator; in his thoughts from right to left: Nanda, Chavan, Mrs. Gandhi, Desai, Patil, Jagjivan Ram, Subramaniam, and Congresswallahs.

courtesy of Times of India  
January 15, 1966

increasingly influential Minister of Agriculture in the Federal Government. After meeting for nearly an hour, the Working Committee found that agreement on either who should become Prime Minister or on a candidate to oppose Desai--either decision hardly possible with Desai present and obdurate--was in fact impossible. Instead it decided that on the following Wednesday, 19 January, there would be an election by secret ballot in the Congress Parliamentary Party for the leadership. Although there was no formal designation of a person to try to find a solution by consensus before the election, as Kamaraj had been designated after Nehru's death, it was obvious that efforts to avoid an election by finding an agreed candidate would go on. And it was equally evident that the key figure in this process would be Kamaraj.

Among the meetings of Friday, as we shall see, one was a straw in the wind. Mrs. Sucheta Kripalani, the Chief Minister of the United Provinces, with the leader of the U.P. Congress faction who supported her as Chief Minister, a man named C.B. Gupta, met with D.P. Mishra, the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh. Some years earlier Mishra had managed to survive a difficult period in M.P. politics with the help of Mrs. Gandhi, and he owed her a debt. Mrs. Gandhi's home state, and that of the entire Nehru family, is the U.P. Editorials appearing in the next day's papers greeted these developments by saying that Mrs. Gandhi and possibly Chavan had emerged as the likely persons to oppose Desai. Mrs. Gandhi was reported not to be seeking the Prime Ministership, but to be willing to oppose Desai if assured of Kamaraj's support which, if it came, would be very wide support indeed, for Kamaraj would not back a losing candidate. Late Friday evening the Press Trust of India, a news agency, reported that the contest on 19 January would be between Mrs. Gandhi and Desai.

On Saturday, the 15th, eight Chief Ministers announced, with Kamaraj as their spokesman, that they supported Mrs. Gandhi for the Prime Ministership. The bandwagon was started rolling when the eight Chief Ministers met at the house of, and reportedly at the instance of, D.P. Mishra. As the day went on other Chief Ministers and political figures jumped aboard. The states from which several of these Chief Ministers came were significant: Maharashtra, where Chavan, Defence Minister and former Chief Minister was still the most powerful political figure, and where S.K. Patil also had a good deal of influence; Andhra, where Sanjiva Reddy controlled the Congress; and Madras, whose Chief Minister could not have made such a move without Kamaraj's sanction. Later on Bengal also supported Mrs. Gandhi, meaning that Atulya Ghosh had made the ring of the syndicate complete. The entire South, 'the solid South', excepting tiny Kerala, which under President's Rule had no Chief Minister, was behind Mrs. Gandhi, as well as Bengal and Assam in the east, Maharashtra in the west, Madhya Pradesh in the center, and the Punjab and Kashmir in the north. Gujarat in the west was Desai's state and would largely support him. Bihar was probably for Mrs. Gandhi. The only state in question was the United Provinces, although there was every likelihood that it would also support her. Kamaraj denied that he had masterminded or even abetted this development, according to the press, but there can be no doubt that he had, and brilliantly. He had kept himself uncommitted and his candidate out of the lists until all others had committed themselves to candidates who, they began to realize, could not win. Yet in backing these candidates they had denied themselves any real freedom of movement, and they had no power to oppose Mrs. Gandhi's

candidacy once she appeared as a contender. Rather, they had to switch to her or be themselves utterly defeated. Stories were heard, perhaps truthful, but leavened with hindsight, that Kamaraj had been convinced, even on his arrival in Delhi, that Mrs. Gandhi should be the candidate that the Congress should put before the Parliamentary Party. Editorials (appearing in the next day's papers) said that Mrs. Gandhi and Chavan had agreed early in the succession period not to oppose one another and to support whomever Kamaraj settled on to be the candidate. They also said that Mrs. Gandhi was chosen largely because she was the only person with a good chance of defeating Desai in the coming election—for he was steadily reiterating his decision to stand no matter what pressure there might be toward unanimity. As the Indian Express put it, "Bar the tumult and the shouting, it looks as if Indira is in."

The next day, Sunday, the 16th, 'an endless stream of visitors including Chief Ministers, Government of India ministers, and members of Parliament called on Mrs. Gandhi to felicitate her on the wide support she had gained for her candidature as Prime Minister,' reported a number of newspapers—power was exerting its magnetic force. At the same time, Desai was saying that the Chief Ministers had no business imposing their personal preferences on the Congress Parliamentary Party. And, he said, the members of Parliament resented this interference in their affairs. Supporters of Mrs. Gandhi pointed out that the selection of a Prime Minister was a national affair and not the sole responsibility of the Parliamentary Party. Eager to ensure Mrs. Gandhi's elections, her followers canvassed assiduously for more votes. There was also a new development. According to The Statesman of the 17th, Jagjivan Ram met Kamaraj for the first time since the succession period began. Ram was a long-time Congressman and Working Committee member from Bihar and a former minister in the Federal Government. He was also from an Untouchable or 'Scheduled' caste and he reportedly controlled nearly 80 votes among Scheduled Caste members of Parliament. In June 1964 he had backed Desai against Shastri. This time, although his votes might not be crucial, they could be important to the outcome of the election. The newspapers considered it significant, if not an implicit declaration in favor of Mrs. Gandhi, that after his meeting with Kamaraj, Ram promised to work for the unanimous choice of a Prime Minister. The next day Ram would meet Kamaraj again, and he eventually publicly declared his support for Mrs. Gandhi.

Monday, the 17th, each of the candidates and their supporters intensified their activities. Desai was reported to be telephoning individual M.P.'s to gain their votes, and he announced that he would send them a written appeal the next day. On the other side, the members of Parliament of the various states were called together to meet as delegations to discuss the succession issue. It is not clear who among the state leaders called their respective M.P.'s together, but the Chief Ministers of the various states attended the meetings as well as many Government of India Ministers and other important figures, like Atulya Ghosh, who were also members of Parliament. Thus nearly all the powerful figures who supported Mrs. Gandhi were present at the meetings of the state M.P. delegations. The result was hardly surprising. At least six state delegations announced their support for Mrs. Gandhi. Several Chief Ministers also announced that M.P.'s from their states would vote for her. All this was

arm-twisting of an obvious sort, but legitimate, it seems to me, in a democratic system, parliamentary or otherwise. The question was, What effect would this have in a secret ballot? Answers varied among both observers and participants. One school of thought held that with a secret ballot every member of Parliament was free to vote as he chose no matter how much pressure had been put on him beforehand. This was certainly true theoretically. Another school held that in India no vote could be secret for long and that because the Chief Ministers control the Congress tickets for the elections (and a general election is due in about a year) an M.P. would be courting unemployment to vote against the wishes of the Chief Minister of his state. For this view, I think, there is much to be said. But many more M.P.'s voted for Desai in the election than the 26 from Gujarat who were subject to his influence, indicating that men of courage were not wanting. Many of Desai's votes allegedly came from Independent members of Parliament, however, indicating contrarily that the influence of the Chief Ministers who were for Mrs. Gandhi, plus the allure of the bandwagon and certain other factors, were the dominant forces in the election.

On Tuesday, the 18th, Mrs. Gandhi gained more adherents, among them Biju Patnaik, the party boss of Orissa who had supported Desai in June 1964, and Jagjivan Ram, who made his support for Mrs. Gandhi public. Kamaraj met with Desai, presumably to get him to withdraw from the contest if not to support Mrs. Gandhi. He failed, and the hard-fought battle for unanimity ended. It became possible to calculate the number of votes the contestants might get, and the Times of India estimated Desai's total as 165. He received 169. The Parliamentary Party completed arrangements and established the procedure for the election the next day.

Wednesday, the 19th (Poh 29, 1887 in the Hindu calendar), the Congress Parliamentary Party met in the Central Hall of Parliament midway between the chambers of the upper and lower houses. Mrs. Gandhi's and Desai's names were proposed and seconded. Their names were placed on the ballots and the voting began. Several quiet and orderly hours later, the result was announced to great cheers. Mrs. Gandhi, the daughter of the father, had won, 365 votes to 169.

### Why Indira?

Among the many many reasons why Mrs. Gandhi emerged as a favorite candidate for the Prime Ministership and ultimately won it in a fair election, several may be mentioned. I shall try to set them out somewhat in the order of importance.

The prime reason for her becoming a candidate was the belief that she was the only person who had a good, if not certain, chance to beat Desai in an election in the Parliamentary Party. "Morarji (Desai) made Indira Prime Minister," was an oft-heard truism. Many observers, including myself, distracted by considerations such as who could govern the country best, kept their eyes too long on Chavan or other candidates. In fact, once Desai's decision to contest the election was announced, Mrs. Gandhi became the only opposition candidate who, in Congress's terms, who could logically oppose him. But not only could Congressmen in government



**Cut down to size ?**

courtesy of The Hindustan Times  
January 20, 1966

## *Winner takes all*



Desai vs. Kamaraj

courtesy of Indian Express  
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and out rally around Mrs. Gandhi for the somewhat negative purpose of defeating Desai, but they and the mass of the population as well, party leaders hoped, could rally around her in her positive role as leader of the country. There is, quite understandably, in any federation, and particularly in one subjected to the strains to unity that India has, a keenness on the part of national leaders to preserve the nation and to encourage sentiments toward unity. Under these conditions a candidate like Mrs. Gandhi is doubly welcome. Additionally, in several states the local Congress is so split by faction that the quality of government has greatly declined, and, more important from the party's viewpoint, there is doubt that in a general election the local factions could unite behind one slate of party candidates in order to make victory in an election possible. Leaders in the Congress and the government apparently hoped that Mrs. Gandhi could be a figure round whom the nation could rally and who could bring harmony out of disunity in the Congress, particularly at the level of the state parties and perhaps even more particularly in her home state of U.P., the most faction-ridden state party of them all. As a ranking member of the Parliamentary Party said to me at the beginning of the succession period, "We will accept a third rate person to avoid a split in the Congress." This is not to say that Mrs. Gandhi is third



rate, although some do not have a high opinion of her abilities, but it is an example of the importance placed on party unity--and Congress unity means to some extent India's national unity. A neck and neck race between any two candidates for the Prime Ministership might have gravely endangered this unity, many Congressmen apparently believed. Hence the emergence of Mrs. Gandhi, the daughter of Nehru, perhaps the best known person in India, as the 'unity-candidate' for the Prime Ministership.

There may also have been a certain number of party and, more likely, state-government leaders who favored Mrs. Gandhi's candidacy because they believed she would be amenable to their influence. Others, D.P. Mishra, for example, were in her debt from times past when she was president of the Congress or when she assisted her father in party affairs. It was also being said in Delhi that with Mrs. Gandhi as Prime Minister, the Congress would continue to be ideologically broad and inclusive and that there would continue to be individual freedom and mobility in the party. With Desai in office, according to the view, the discipline of the Congress would become tighter and its outlook narrower and farther to the 'right'. Desai was also a strong Hindi supporter (although his native tongue was Gujerati), and Kamaraj and other leaders from the South may have opposed him for this reason. Yet they may have thought it impolitic to back another non-Hindi speaker like Chavan for fear of unduly irritating the strong Hindi group in the North. If this was their reasoning, Mrs. Gandhi, a Hindi speaker from the United Provinces, but like her father moderate in her approach to the language issue, may have seemed a good compromise candidate. The believers in consensus also found Mrs. Gandhi's presence on the scene comforting, I think. Although there would be a contest for the Prime Ministership, the maverick would be isolated, they hoped, and the candidate with the "broadest acceptability" would be chosen, vindicating the traditional method of choice.

The most interesting part of the succession, to me, was the almost total absence of discussion by the political figures involved of the possible candidates' abilities to govern the country well. I talked with a small number of the persons involved and with several observers who had had many interviews with the participants in the succession. Only rarely were these observers or I told that so and so would make a good Prime Minister because of his decisiveness or clearheadedness or because of his ability to lead the Cabinet as a coherent maker and executer of policy or because of his ability to use (and not be used by) the civil service and to bring efficiency to an ensnarled government. No one spoke of the next Prime Minister in terms of solving the food or foreign exchange crises. Several politicians and M.P.'s told me that the next Prime Minister should be dependable and a realist, and that he (or she) should be able to implement the Tashkent Agreement (no doubt all desirable qualifications), but that was the most they said. Newspaper columnists and editorials frequently spoke in the most emphatic and cogent terms about the mechanism of Indian government, of the needs of the hour, and of the qualifications of the Prime Minister. But the participants evidently believed Congress Party unity and the winning of the 1967 elections to be the supreme needs of the nation. The unity of the Congress and of India, I would agree, are essential to the national welfare, but they are not the only considerations. Moreover, it is doubtful if anything but a cataclysm or a total breakdown of the Congress Party in the states could lead to a Congress

defeat in the general elections. Even understanding the Congress's occasional preoccupation with its 'image', there is, I think it can be argued, plenty of room for manouver by the party: it could have paid more attention to the ability of the future Prime Minister than it did last week. Defence Minister Chavan was in the matter of ability the man best qualified for the Prime Ministership, if the opinion of many observers is correct. Yet he seems to have been passed over rather perfunctorily in favor of a unity-candidate.

On the other hand, it can be argued with some degree of truth, I think, that other possible candidates for the job were passed over because they might have governed badly, or at least not in conformity with the established pattern of government and authority. This adds a further positive aspect to the choice of Mrs. Gandhi. Nanda, it appears, was the first to be dropped on these grounds. Although he enjoyed brief popularity as a candidate because he might prove manageable or be a unity-candidate, he seems to have been dropped because he had lacked the qualities of popularity and leadership that would have given him victory over Desai and because his reputation, as one member of Parliament said, was that "of a confused man who cannot inspire confidence among his colleagues in the government or among the public". The leaders of the Congress kept Desai from becoming Prime Minister primarily for the opposite reasons, it is said. Although Desai is thought to be a good administrator, he has a reputation for high-handed obstinacy and inflexibility, according to some sources, and he is a man of personal quirks. If he became Prime Minister it was feared that he would have run the government singlehandedly, ignoring the Cabinet and all advisors. The Chief Ministers could do with a little whip cracking, particularly on the food problem, and India needs a firm personality as Prime Minister even if a variety of wide-bottomed bureaucrats are displeased. But there is no reason why a democracy cannot reject a candidate for office if it fears that he will violate the chosen norms of government. Shastri, according to most accounts, was mastering the intricacies of the political system here. He was moulding the Cabinet into a coherent policy-making body that could lead the country, and he was beginning to work the federal system successfully—two things the country badly needed. Yet he was doing this largely through the traditional channels of power with a minimum of personal affront to bested opponents. His leadership, therefore, was accepted, but that of Desai rejected. It is likely that such considerations, as well as her national popularity, worked in favor of Mrs. Gandhi's election as Prime Minister.

#### Assessment and Afterthoughts

There are several quite evident similarities and differences between the recent succession and that after Nehru died. In both cases the search for a new Prime Minister was carried on with dispatch and purposefulness. The activities of the participants may have been hectic and antlike, but the atmosphere was calm; no wind or lightening came, nor was any expected, so far as I could tell, by Delhi or the nation. Yet after Nehru's death, there was a certain fear of the unknown. It was the first succession, and a replacement had to be found for the great man, the

over-awing banyan tree of Indian politics. Could it be done and done well? Indians themselves no less than the remainder of the world were asking, 'After Nehru Who?' and 'After Nehru What?' This time there was a great deal more confidence. A new Prime Minister had been successfully, indeed gracefully, found last time; therefore it could be done again. Moreover, this time the eyes of the world were not upon India to anywhere near the same extent: India was not on trial. Also, there was not so great a vacuum to be filled after Shastri's death. He may have been, or been about to become, a greater Prime Minister than Nehru, but he was a man. Nehru was nearly a god, so, psychologically speaking, the task of finding a replacement was greater.

Because Shastri died unexpectedly, there had been no thought to 'After Shastri Who?', whereas for years Indians had been asking themselves what would happen when Nehru died. This probably proved a good thing, for India was presented with a situation which it will have to meet more often than the Nehru-type succession. Especially important in this regard was that the possible candidates entered the contest on more equal terms. No candidate had the lead Shastri had in June 1964 as the result of Nehru's laying on of hands at the Bhubaneshwar Congress session, when he was first taken ill and it was apparent that his death would not be many months delayed. This difference made the recent succession as difficult to achieve smoothly as the previous one, and it put Congress unity and the members' ability to operate the selection process to a sterner test. That Desai withdrew his bid in 1964 and stood firm this time is the measure of the different situations. The choosing of Mrs. Gandhi as Prime Minister was entirely a Congress affair--as one would expect in a parliamentary system, Congress being the majority party. Yet the Congress Parliamentary Party, even though it finally made Mrs. Gandhi Prime Minister by voting for her and not for Morarji Desai, had a minor voice in the really important decision: choosing Mrs. Gandhi as the stop-Desai candidate. This minor role, however, was greater than the part it played in the selection of Shastri, and it was greater this time, despite the advantageous position of Mrs. Gandhi, because the vote did mean something and the allegiance of state delegations of members of Parliament was important. The presence of certain Cabinet ministers, <sup>in the councils of decision,</sup> and ministers by the nature of the system are also M.P.'s, did not significantly add to the influence of the Parliamentary Party. The members of the Parliamentary Party over the years since independence have gained a fairly strong corporate feeling, particularly in regard to interference in government by the organizational wing of the Congress. But in a matter like the choice of a Prime Minister this quite understandably cannot be translated into unified support for a single candidate.

Neither did the Working Committee of the Congress, traditionally the vital point of decision-making in the party, this time provide the framework for the decision. The Committee did not even for form's sake announce the decision to make Mrs. Gandhi a candidate. This was primarily because most of the major protagonists in the succession were members of the Working Committee and were hopelessly divided among themselves. Desai was a committee member as were Jagjivan Ram and Biju Patnaik, who had supported him in 1964 against Shastri and who this time backed Mrs. Gandhi only late in the game. Kamaraj and the syndicate, also members, were

apparently backing different candidates until Mrs. Gandhi's candidacy became so strong that the syndicate jumped on the bandwagon rather than to be left, without influence, in the dust behind. This would, incidentally, seem to destroy the myth of syndicate power that had a vogue after the Nehru succession.

With no decision possible within the Working Committee, Kamaraj went outside it to get support for his candidate. Of the eight Chief Ministers who originally supported Mrs. Gandhi, only two were members of the committee, Sukhadia and Nijalingappa, of Rajasthan and Mysore. It can be reasonably argued that three or four others among these eight Chief Ministers owed allegiance to powerful members of the committee, including to Kamaraj himself, but nevertheless the move to push Mrs. Gandhi forward was made outside the Working Committee. That Desai cried foul at this tactic was not simply a move to arouse the corporate feeling of Parliamentary Party members, thereby gaining support for himself. It was also the expression, I expect, of his genuine belief that the choice of a Prime Minister was a Federal Government affair.

In fact, this succession seems to have overturned, or at least caused modifications in several patterns of decision-making that had been thought to be "traditional" or at least customary. The Working Committee was not the key group, as it had often been, especially in the vital struggles for Congress leadership in 1938 (the Subhash Chandra Bose affair) or in 1950-51 (the clash between Nehru and Purushottam Das Tandon). Nor was the power almost entirely in the hands of the government wing of the Congress as had been the case in Nehru's days as Prime Minister. Nor, as we have seen, was the pattern the same as during the Nehru succession. This time there was a peculiar development: the head of the national organizational wing (the Congress president) allied with the governmental wing at the state level (the Chief Ministers--behind whom was the influence of part of the national government wing, Government of India ministers who had great influence in their home states) made a decision for the governmental wing of the party in Delhi. And an incidental note: the organizational wing at the state level (the Provincial Congress Committees) was out of the decision entirely, totally eclipsed by the central leadership, whether of the governmental or organizational wing, even more than it has been in the 18 years since independence.

The importance of the Chief Ministers in this succession is another indication, I think of the increasing importance of the states in the processes of federal government here. Indeed, the power of the states in India has always been much greater than is immediately apparent from the nation's centralized (although federal) Constitution. That this power is potentially exercisable in a largely negative way--non-cooperation with the wishes of the Federal Government--has often led to its underestimation. (The role of the states in the language and food issues during the past 18 months has done much to disabuse Indians and foreigners of their beliefs about omnipotent federal power.) Now the states have used their influence in a positive way, setting a further precedent. I would add here that I think the balance of power is with the central government and will remain so and that an increase in state influence, as far as it can be foreseen, will not endanger India's unity.

The part played by the Chief Ministers also seems to indicate the realization by Delhi, however grudging, that the selection of a Prime Minister is more than a central government affair. It indicates the realization that in a federal country the component states have a great interest in the national leadership and should have an effective way to express their views about it. Theoretically, the states and all Indians have a say in the choice of a Prime Minister through the members of Parliament, whom they elect. But actually it has not worked out this way to any important degree because of the forces that operate in Delhi and because M.P.'s do not yet greatly reflect the viewpoints of the constituents, at least on matters of great moment.

All the details of the succession must not obscure that it took place within the framework of the Congress, mother Congress. This is still the central fact of Indian politics: that within the Congress all competing ideas and systems meet, including ideas and systems for prime ministerial succession. For 40 years this has been true and the strength of this tradition, as well as the truly impressive history of the Congress as the leader of the freedom movement, binds Congressmen to the party. Congressmen fear schism within the party like the plague, although they indulge themselves in it, but they fear breakaway from the party much less. Splits away from the party as a result of the succession by any major personality or group are doubtful, and whatever changes take place as a result of it will be within the party itself. The leaders of the Congress may also be thinking along the lines of some observers here: that within the framework of the Congress some accommodation and adjustment can be made between the parliamentary and federal systems. If the parliamentary system does not on paper allow for the participation of the state governments or of their citizens directly in the choice of a Prime Minister, as does the presidential system in the United States, allowance for this can be made within the Congress, as it apparently was last week. As a friend of mine remarked, the existence of institutions like federalism and presidential or parliamentary systems mean less than the way in which peoples work the institutions. Such flexibility seems to be an indication of an often unsuspected maturity and sophistication in the Indian political system.

A further change or modification of customary behavior that took place, or was begun, concerned decision-making by unanimity or by consensus. The secret ballot for the Prime Minister was a major break with custom. It was by no means a complete break, and those in the party desiring consensus greatly outnumbered those who were opposed to it. Tradition or what is believed to be tradition does not die easily, and there may be much to be said for reaching decisions this way. But it was very important that the major political leaders of the nation and intellectuals, represented by the newspapers, conducted a serious discussion of democratic methods. Those in favor of a choice by consensus last week said that a vote might leave behind bitterness and recrimination among the losers. They said it might lead to schism within the party, and particularly that it might lead to a split in Delhi like that in several state capitals where a section of the party has lined up behind the government in a 'ministerialist' group and the

'dissidents' have dedicated themselves to obstructing government activity and programs. They said that consensus was more 'Indian' and truly democratic than the crass, 'Western' method of voting. And they also said that with India's need for unity and for a national endeavor to meet the food and other problems, there must be a Prime Minister who was the choice of all the people. Those who preferred a vote argued that consensus often meant only superficial agreement, a papering over of the cracks. They said that such a semblance of unity was worthless. They also argued that a vote (secret ballot) was more democratic because a parliamentarian could vote as he pleased whereas in an open discussion of persons trying to reach consensus any dissent could bring retaliation from the dominant group, even if it were only a minority. In the light of recent politics here this is a powerful point. At the heart of this discussion lies, I suspect, the concern with 'ends' and 'means', and the emphasis that the 'means' must be at least as ethical as the desired 'end', that Gandhi brought to Indian political thought. To have challenged such a hallowed 'means' as consensus was a major event here. The Congress's response to the challenge will be further test of its resiliency in the face of innovation and change.

One can try to make a few guesses about the effects of the Shastri succession. In the future a vote at the time of major decisions will not arouse the fear or distrust it has in the past. As the Government and the Congress faced the Shastri succession with a confidence founded on its success after Nehru died, so now the succession has been put to a vote with no (apparent) ill-effects, and a minor but influential precedent has been established. The state governments, as has been said, will try to play an increasing part in major decisions of national government. But the 169 votes that Desai received in the secret ballot is also an indication of the limits of the control that Chief Ministers can exert on parliamentary delegations from their states. The prestige of the Parliament may have gained by this and the increase in state power be to some degree offset. The relative power of the Congress president and the Prime Minister are again in flux. But unless the precedent of government here and elsewhere is overturned, power will slowly gravitate toward Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as it did toward Shastri and toward the government wing of the party in 1947. Mrs. Gandhi may be much more beholden to Kamaraj for her position than Shastri was, and to the Chief Ministers, thus increasing their influence with her. But it is equally true that she saved them from Desai. She then has a club of her own. In her fight for independence the Nehru name will be a further advantage.

Yours sincerely,

*Red Austin*

Granville S. Austin