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The Congress: The Gathering of the Clan

Laxmibai Nagar  
Indore  
India  
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Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York.

Dear Mr. Rogers,

I have just attended the 62nd annual session of the Indian National Congress in Indore. Television is still a couple of years away in India, but as one who took in last year's Democratic and Republican conventions by television, I am wondering how the Congress Party convention would have appeared on TV screens: cows wandering in the streets outside the convention grounds, mothers placidly suckling their young during the general meetings, and Nehru delivering the main convention discourses standing in stockinged feet.

The Chicago and San Francisco convention-viewer might have been taken aback by some notable omissions at the Indore session too. There were no campaign buttons, no State placards waving for recognition, no nominations, no ballots. Nobody won, nobody lost. And there was no Betty Furness.

On the other hand, the spontaneous demonstrations were really spontaneous: a crowd rushing to greet Nehru blasted through the restraining police lines and for a moment there could have been a riot.

Coming less than three months before the general elections scheduled for February 25 - March 14, the Congress session was primarily an election pep rally. It was also a mixture of jamboree, State fair, indoctrination course, bazar, livestock show and religious pilgrimage.

It was a meeting largely centered around a dead man, Gandhi, and one very much alive, Nehru---"Panditji" or "the Prime Minister" or "the P.M."---Nehru lecturing softly, pleading earnestly, smiling broadly, scowling darkly. It was a meeting also revolving around several men, those on the top roost of party leadership: Pandit G.B. Pant, the walrus-moustached Home Minister; Dr. B.C.Roy, the big, moon-faced Chief Minister of West Bengal and party chief in Calcutta; S.K. Patil, swarthy, smiling party boss in Bombay; Morarji Desai, tall slender Minister of Commerce and Consumer Industries and a party trouble-shooter; Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Nehru's handsome and shrewd daughter and a skillful politician herself; and U.N. Dhebar, the plodding party workhorse with the Hitler moustache who is the party president. It was also a meeting of many men, of thousands of white-capped Congressmen gathered from throughout all India, and of tens of thousands of little people: villagers and peasants who dressed in their best poor clothes and walked in from the surrounding countryside to witness the great event; to see the great men, then go back to tell their families and friends what they had seen and heard.

The Congress session had been widely advertised as an "historic" meeting. Party drum-beaters pointed out that the session came coincidentally in the

centennial year of the "War of Independence" (formerly the "Sepoy Mutiny"), during the first year of the Second Five-Year Plan, and, more to the point, on the eve of what the Congress expects will be another five-year lease on India's political leadership.

Officially, the main business of the week-long convention was to consider and adopt the 7000-word draft Election Manifesto, and to revise the party constitution to make the party goal the establishment of a "socialist cooperative commonwealth" instead of a plain "cooperative commonwealth". Actually, most of the program time was taken up by repetitive exposition of the manifesto by Nehru and a couple of dozen subordinates, and the revision of the constitution brought no surprise: Nehru has been an avowed socialist since at least 1934, and the party, after several years of using the term "democratic socialism" and "socialistic pattern of society" simply came out and called a spade a spade.

Some of the most interesting and important business at Indore was not on the convention program. It was the campaigning for "tickets", the party nominations for the 500 seats in the national House of the People and the 3102 seats in the 14 State Legislative Assemblies that the Congress seeks to fill. The final allocation of tickets was only a couple weeks away, and prospective Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assemblies (MIAs) and their backers used the Indore convocation as a good opportunity to plead their cases.

I have come through the Congress session pretty tired and hungry--- as a concession to purists, only vegetarian meals were served at the convention site, and I am largely carnivorous. Having been in India less than a week, I was also fairly well confused. But I also have gained some first-hand although first-time impressions about the Congress, its leadership, its membership and its program. Briefly, they are as follows:

The Congress, as the spearhead of the Indian independence movement, sees itself as the "inheritors of history" (in Nehru's term) and as the only group capable of leading India on the "great adventure" (the manifesto phrase) of building a new India. Proud of India's---and ipso facto, Congress'---accomplishments since Independence the party is full of self-assurance and optimism. When President Dhebar stated in his opening address that "Congress alone can provide all the character, statesmanship and capacity for taking the country forward," he was stating a party article of faith as well as making a campaign claim.

There is a seeming unanimity of viewpoint at the top level of Congress leadership that perhaps comes from long association in pre-Independence days and from allegiance to Nehru as the heir of Gandhi. How far down into the lower levels of the party this unity carries I do not know. Party workers I talked with seemed to bear strong loyalty to the leadership and even awe-struck faith in it, but there were also undertones of "machine", of strong control from the top that keeps Congressmen in line.

Just as the Congress sees itself as an avant guard devoted to leading the Indian people along to a brighter tomorrow ("Our people are backward, but they can learn" one hears again and again) so the Congress leadership appears to be an elite within the party, thrust to the top by dint of class, education and experience in public life, and devoted to leading, or pulling, the rank and file along. The Congress session rolled along like a well-oiled machine. While local party leaders attempted by means of amendments and resolutions to tighten some of the rosy generalizations of the manifesto to more concrete, step-by-step programs, all the amendments were in the end withdrawn by their sponsors. No one rocked the boat.

For all that, there are divisive tendencies within the party. Regional, linguistic, religious and caste loyalties vie with party and national loyalties. Some Northern and Southern delegates were literally unable to converse with each other because

they knew no common language. Members of the Sikh Akali Dal group from the Punjab, taking the cue from their leader, venerable Master Tara Singh, were letting it to be known that they might pull out of the party if they were not provided with a "just" number of tickets. On the eve of the session, 1000 Congress workers in Bihar province announced they would oppose official Congress nominees, "not because this or that person had not been given a ticket, but to voice the protest of true Congressmen against the manner in which the selections had been made."

The Election Manifesto uses the words "Congress", "we", "India" and "the Government of India" interchangeably. I do not think this is deliberately misleading, considering the Congress' historical role. Yet I also got the impression that the Congress was very careful not to weaken itself at the expense of giving India better MPs and MLAs. When President Dhebar stated that one-third of sitting Congress legislators would be replaced by new candidates ("to find a place for new blood, women and minorities") he explained that the aim was to give Congress workers the chance to gain experience in parliamentary and legislative fields, and also to use the experience of the present legislators in strengthening the party organization. I found the chairman of a District Congress Committee (DCC) from Mysore who said he had been asked by the party High Command to run for the House of the People, but he had so far refused in order to "hold my DCC together". I also found legislators who had been denied new tickets who appeared quite reconciled to their retirement from office and were glad, in a word, to be getting "back to the party". We have a little joke in the Congress, an MP told me. "We say that when a party worker wants to retire, he takes a seat as an MP or MLA." He laughed, but only a little. At any rate, I sensed that the party was not sacrificing organization control and leadership by sending its very best men to the legislatures; and it seemed that party workers in some cases considered working within the party a more exciting, and less expensive, game than going up to a legislature to take cues from the party whip.

It was rather surprising to go to the political convention and hear so little about political opponents. Facing the Congress candidates will be candidates from the three other "all-India" parties: the Communist Party of India (CPI), the Praja (People's) Socialist Party (PSP), and the Bharatiya Jana Sangh ("People's Party of India") ---a host of other parties and independent candidates. The opposition was there, but barely. A party organizer explained, "The Socialists are simply former Congressmen who are disgruntled. The Communists can do nothing; Bulganin and Khrushchev and Chou have come to India and praised Nehru to the skies, and the Communists have lost ground on this Stalin and Hungarian business. The Communalists (Jana Sangh, chiefly) appeal only to a few religious fanatics. The rest of the field is disorganised and weak and can do nothing. Now, how can we lose! Isn't it so?"

I made my way to Indore on the "Congress Special" provided by the Indian Railways for "VIPs", MPs, MLAs, and party leaders. "Special" should be interpreted as "irregular", however, for the rickety 10-car train chugged in fits and starts along the 531 miles to the convention site. We pulled off the main track at the drop of a flag, and we laid over, it seemed, just for the practice.

My companions in the stuffy compartment were two MPs. One was a hulking man whose red-stained teeth showed him as a man given to chewing betel leaf. The second was a stocky, broad-faced man with grey, close-cropped hair, a contemplative man more likely to be found meditating under a pipal tree than sitting in the national assembly. Both men wore the hand-spun cotton and hand-woven woollens of dyed-in-the wool Congressmen.

Only the second man spoke English. He helped me make my bed, then sat Buddha-like on his own bunk and talked amiably. He was an advocate in Benaras. He had been a Congressman since 1921, when "Gandhiji called us." During the Independence movement he had been jailed seven times, or "two less than Panditji." He then proceeded to tell me at length about the three greatest men who ever lived, apart from purely religious leaders.

They were Moses, who "lead his people out of bondage to freedom..."; Abraham Lincoln, who "brought freedom to a people not his own (the Negroes) and sacrificed himself in doing it..."; and Gandhi, who "took the bullet himself in order to free his people by peaceful means..." No sooner had he finished than he asked for the time (8 o'clock), turned off the lights, and said goodnight. Our other companion was already fast asleep, in his suit.

The following morning in the dim dawn, I was awakened by the sound of tapping. I glanced at the berth opposite and saw my philosopher friend kneeling on his bunk, wriggling his neck, snapping his teeth together in tempo with a random tune he was humming. Our other companion was still fast asleep, in his suit.

At the first stop, the distinguished passengers stepped down from cars to take a cup of tea and an orange or two from the hawkers on the platform. As the whistle signaled the pull out of the station, there was a sudden scrambling, a game of musical chairs, to see who got together with whom in which compartment. The game of round-robin politicking continued throughout the day. I'm afraid I was left out. My companions left me in favor of the game, and except for brief but frequent station breaks when I could step down and chat on the platform, I was left watching the luggage in our compartment.

Pulling into Indore after a full day on the train, we were met by youth volunteers and chauffeured in taxi cabs through streets strung with electric lights to Laxmibai Nagar, the abandoned military post, named for a lady warrior who was killed fighting the British in 1858, which served as the convention site. A college-boy volunteer guided me to a bare room in a barrack marked "Press Camp", and I plunked down my bags.

The barrack was crowded with Indian newspaper reporters and photographers ---more than 80 finally were on hand. The foreign press---AP, UP, CBS newsreel, The New York Times, and British, French, Russian, Italian, Swedish, Polish and Japanese reporters---for the most part stayed in the hotels downtown.

A young reporter from Trivandrum offered to show me around, and we went for a stroll around the 400-acre grounds. The network of streets was crammed with buses, cabs, motor-scooters and above all, people and their baggage. And more traffic, walking and wheeled, streamed under the giant gate-arches of bamboo and canvas that marked the entrance to the grounds. On the parade grounds, sheets of corrugated iron had been lashed to bamboo frames to create a sprawling temporary town of shelters and dining halls. (The small fry were housed in these shelters, the slightly higher-ups were in barracks, big shots stayed in bungalows, and Nehru and the chosen few were ensconced in the old British Residency in town.) Dominating the convention area were two huge pandals, or auditoria, one covered by stretches of canvas to provide a sheltered meeting place for 12,000, the other vast circular open-air enclosure for 100,000. A blazing line of lights a half-mile long marked the row of stalls that housed restaurants, tea and coffee shops, cigarette and betel-leaf stands, book stalls, a post office, a railroad office, and shops selling glassware, soap, toys, candy, folding furniture, bicycles, brassieres, musical instruments, flashlight batteries and what-not. There was also a fire station, a nursery, a children's playground, a dispensary and a police station. Photographs and paintings of Congress heroes past and present, Lokmanya Tilak, S.V. Patel, Gandhi --- most Gandhi --- Indian president Rajendra Prasad, and Nehru, were hung everywhere. Music, full of reedy weaving and clanging tambourines, came over the loudspeakers to fill up the air; occasionally a voice would break through to read a warning to beware of pickpockets. For all the thousands of people who strolled in the streets, there were other thousands who swarmed in the open places and along the bazar. In the farther reaches of the convention grounds, still others watched a cattle and poultry show or a program of folk dances or the exhibitions of the states in a separate village of pavilion. Spotlights played on saffron-white-and-green Congress flags. The only things missing were pink lemonade and popcorn.

The next morning I rose, ate a breakfast of two bootleg hard-boiled eggs in the Press Camp kitchen (the vegetarian ban covered eggs elsewhere), and proceeded to

hobnob with Congressmen.

Ideally, the Congress is composed of men and women who are brought together in a common purpose, viz., the "Object" stated in Article 1 of the Congress Constitution: "the well-being and advancement of the people of India and the establishment in India, by peaceful and legitimate means, of a Cooperative Commonwealth (now 'socialist') based on equality of opportunity and of political, economic and social rights and aiming at world peace and fellowship." Seven and half millions of Indians are "primary" members of the Congress, having declared their acceptance of the object and paid the annual membership fee of four annas (five cents). The real party faithful, however, are the 75,000 of "active" members. An "active" member must show that he is a "primary" member of at least two years standing, is a habitual wearer of khadi (hand-spun or woven fabrics, the Gandhian symbol of resistance and peasant strength), is a teetotler, does not observe or recognise untouchability, devotes time regularly to some national community or social service, and each year either pays Rs.10, enrolls 50 primary members, or contributes 25 gundis of self-spun yarn.

From Congressmen of all kinds --- land-owners, businessmen, lawyers, party professionals, lady politicians, and men who were cracked on the head and jailed during the struggle for independence --- one is greeted with a great deal of orthodox party line. There is the incessant plea that it is principle which binds Congress together. Occasionally I ran into someone like a Sikh industrialist who confided, "I have to belong to the Congress." His argument was that "No other political party has anything to offer. I can't go with Communists. The Socialists want to do everything (nationalization of industry) over-night. And the communalists are absolutely out-of-date. I must belong to the Congress if I want to protect myself, to find out which way the wind blows, to work from inside."

The highest executive authority of the Congress is the 21-member Working Committee, usually known as the High Command. It is the agent of the governing All-India Congress Committee (AICC) composed of 489 members chosen by the Pradesh (Provincial) Congress Committees (PCCs). The PCCs in turn are composed of representatives of District Congress Committees (DCCs), corresponding to the district level in the governmental system. There are committees at the village and mandal (several communities) levels too.

Other arms of the Congress include:

(1) the Parliamentary Board, consisting of the party President, Nehru and four Cabinet ministers, who "regulate and coordinate parliamentary activities", i.e., serve as an "inner cabinet."

(2) Parliamentary Parties at the national and pradesh level, which are the party caucuses.

(3) the Central Election Committee (CEC), composed of the Parliamentary Board plus five other top-notch politicians (including Indira Gandhi), whose purpose is to "conduct election campaigns and make the final selection of candidates for the national and pradesh legislatures."

Control from top is reinforced by several other devices. For example, the Working Committee has the power to "superintend; direct and control all PCCs and subordinate committees;" it can suspend PCCs and appoint ad hoc substitutes in the event the PCC is guilty of "failure to function in terms of the Constitution or in accordance with the direction of the Working Committee." Moreover, AICC members, MPs and MIAs are all members ex officio (but without vote) of the PCCs and DCCs from which they are elected.

Organized up to the hilt, the Congress has three general secretaries, a good-sized secretariat, departments for Women, Youth, Foreign Relations, Publications, and Economic and Political Research, and service branches and programs which perform service to out-castes, work on village sanitation, "uplift of women", health and hygiene, flood relief, and other good works.

There is a touch of embarrassment in some party quarters about all this organization. "The Congress is not at all like your political parties," began a youth organizer who had recently visited the States. "We feel very keenly our mission to bring the people up, you see. We are not merely a political party organized to win votes. Primarily we represent a movement of the Indian people which has gained political independence and now is on the path to social and economic equality as well. But because our people are so uneducated and backward we must exercise our leadership along very practical and straightforward lines."

The handling of the convention agenda was a good example of handling business along practical and straightforward lines. A case in point is the draft Election manifesto.

Last summer, CBS' Edward R. Murrow said that while a platform was usually something to stand on, a political platform was usually something to hide under. The Election manifesto of the Congress appears to be some of both. It is a broad platform, large enough, all-inclusive enough, to accommodate the whole party and nearly all the electorate. It sounds more like a resource for party campaigners than an appeal to voters. It is replete with exhortation and filled with philosophical reflection. It was generally understood at Laxmibai Nagar that Nehru had drafted the manifesto.

The general tone of the document is one promoting optimism, gradualism, cooperation, diligence and mutual understanding. It reminds one and all of the Congress' role in India's accomplishments, and it sermonizes at length on the tasks ahead. The goals are "socialism and democracy, and peaceful and legitimate means." The dangers from within are communalism, caste, lavish display and internecine conflicts; from without, the chief danger is the cold war --- otherwise India stands by the panch sheel (five principles) and "will continue" to solve the disputes over Goa and Kashmir by peaceful means.

Most of the manifesto is devoted to providing condolence or encouragement or promises to the "have-nots" of India.

The poor: "...There should be no exploitation and no monopolies, and disparities in income should be progressively lessened. A national minimum in the general standard of living should be aimed at, so that everyone has the necessities of life and the opportunity for education, for maintaining his health and for productive work."

The underprivileged: "...Old ideas about privileges on the basis of birth or caste or money or the hierarchy of office should be discarded. Men should be judged by their labour, their productive and creative efforts and their services to society and humanity."

The cultivators: "On the land, all intermediaries must be progressively removed, so that land is owned by the cultivator himself. The principle of ceilings on land has been accepted and should be progressively introduced, so as to bring about a better distribution of land."

The villagers: "...The disparity that exists today between village and town should be progressively lessened."

Landless labourers: "Effective action should be taken to improve (their) economic position and social status.... There should be expansion of work opportunities, fixation of minimum wages, allotment of house sites and resettlement schemes."

Refugees from Pakistan: "Every effort has been made, and will continue to be made, to help these people, who have had to leave home and hearth and have to begin a new life."

Minorities: "Every attempt must be made to ensure that... no minority is made to suffer because it is either a religious or linguistic minority."

The unemployed: "Planning has... to aid at the progressive lessening of unemployment and its final elimination. This will chiefly take place by the growth of industry and, more especially, small-scale and village industries."

Other groups are reminded of present Congress blessings:

Women: "(Via) reform of the Hindu Law in regard to marriage and divorce and inheritance by women... out-of-date customs which bore down upon our womenfolk have been ended."

The tribal people: "The constitution has made special provision for them, so they may progress according to their own genius and ways of life." (The paragraph singles out the Nagas, now in rebellion, as "a brave people, who are a credit to India.... It is hoped that the misunderstandings and apprehensions that have misled them will be removed....")

"Untouchables": "No subject was dearer to Gandhiji than the removal of untouchability... The Congress made this cause of the Harijans its own.... by our Constitution and the legislation passed thereafter the practice of untouchability was made an offence...."

There is in addition, support of several matters generally regarded here as conducive to the good life: health improvement, industrial peace, education and prohibition.

For the "have's" in Indian society, on the other hand, the landowners and industrialists and big businessmen, the manifesto carried little to cheer about, unless it was the oft-repeated chorus, "progressively", which may be interpreted as "gradually", "slowly", or even "by and by". Otherwise, the future looks pretty grim, according to the manifesto:

Item: "On the land, all intermediaries must be progressively removed... The principle of ceilings on land has been accepted and should be progressively introduced...."

Item: "... The principle burden of finding resources (for national progress)... should be spread out in such a way as to fall chiefly on those who are in a better position to shoulder it. The structure of taxation is being reconstructed with this object in view. This process will also help in reducing disparities in income and wealth."

Item: "The Congress welcomes the nationalisation of the State Bank as well as of life insurance. This is another step towards a socialist pattern and it gives a greater measure of strategic control for planning and other purposes of the State....It is not intended to nationalise the existing private industries, except where such is considered necessary in terms of planning or where they occupy a strategic position in the economy of the country. Private enterprise will be encouraged, but always in the context of the Plan."

Throughout the manifesto there is exhortation to cooperate ("Cooperation is the law of life in human communities...."), to maintain high moral standards ("(as) Gandhiji impressed upon the Congress and our people"), and to use peaceful means ("Not only because they are in tune with India's thinking...but also because thus can we maintain the unity and integrity of India and not waste our substance in internecine conflicts.").

The "dangers of communalism" and the "evil of caste" are denounced, but with no particular fury. On foreign policy, the manifesto reaffirms the party advocacy of "peaceful solutions" in Goa and Kashmir, denounces "racialism" in South Africa, regrets the absence of Communist China from the UN, and upholds international friendship and the panch sheel.

Finally, the manifesto gets around to asking for votes, please:

"For three generations, it has been the privilege of the Congress to serve and identify itself with the people of India. For over 60 years, it was the standard bearer in India's struggle for freedom and, under the inspired leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, it achieved success and opened a new chapter in India's long history. For ten years, it has been responsible for the governance of this great country... It seeks again, therefore, a renewal from the people of India, of that faith and confidence which they have given it in such abundant measure in the past. With renewed strength firmly based on the goodwill of the people, it is determined to labour for the advancement of the Indian people and world peace."

The four days of "debate" on the manifesto were in reality four days of exposition of it by Nehru and the highly placed. The 30 amendments proposed by members of the AICC were dismissed by some reporters as attempts by their sponsors to step for a moment into the convention spotlight or to appease the folks back home. Whatever they were, the proposals show a rather consistent effort to tighten up some of the principle-laden generalizations of the draft manifesto by inserting some concrete plans, and to extend the boundaries of socialism beyond the limits now set by the party leadership. A few of the proposals ran as follows:

" Effective steps will be taken... to define shortly the precise proportion between the minimum and the maximum (standard of living) (and to) fix a floor with regard to the minimum earning which an individual should be entitled to have."

" Attempts should be made to provide free medical service to persons having an annual income below Rs.500."

" The Government should form State-aided cooperative marketing societies to take over and store agricultural produce and (retail) it to consumers at a fair price."

" All State governments should abolish the present systems of land revenue from the peasantry and introduce instead a graduated agricultural income tax with exemptions for those with low incomes."

With President Dhebar limiting the time of the speeches of proponents of the non-official resolutions and amendments, and with members of the High Command and Cabinet ministers rising to argue against the proposals, and with Nehru himself dismissing some proposals ("It is a dangerous thing to make false promises which cannot be fulfilled," or, more directly, "I cannot accept this amendment."), in the end the proposals were in every case withdrawn by their sponsors. It may be that the High Command, which has the final say-so on the allocation of tickets, really expected no serious efforts to tamper with the manifesto as it was drafted.

While a couple dozen party stalwarts came to the microphone during the course of the convention to expound the manifesto, it was Nehru who spoke at greatest length and most importantly. His discourses comprise a sort of "Nehru Lectures", each an hour or an hour and a half long, that were the highlight of the convention. His main theme was the nature of the unfolding Indian socialism and the necessity of bringing it about by democratic, peaceful, and gradual means. He wandered through lengthy lessons on Indian and world history, on economic and social theory, on internal and international politics. (As anxiously expected he sailed into the Eisenhower Plan for the Middle East, but he disappointed some by failing to give any "inside" information about his talks with the American president).

When Nehru was driven up to the convention grounds in a Chrysler convertible in the morning, a crowd of several hundred-----Congressmen, hooky-playing students holidaying peasants--- had long been waiting to greet him. Handsome, fresh, smiling, dressed in white cotton jodhpurs, long achkan coat, collar-less shirt and the inevitable white Congress cap, he was ushered up to the rear entrance of the smaller pandal and guided to the platform where sat the party brass.



The platform was covered with a mattress-like padding and studded with great cylindrical pillows. Nehru took off his shoes, left them on the edge of the platform, made his way amidst greetings to a pillow nearest the microphone, and whipped two or three newspapers out of his brief-case. While business proceeded, he read.

The pandal, festooned with Congress flags, was filling up with delegates, paying guests and the press, all of whom also took off their shoes or sandals and sat on the burlap carpet and cotton sheeting that covered the ground. A forest of stout bamboo poles held up the canvas roof. It was cool.

A parade of party leaders made their way to the microphone to shove forward the convention business. Motions were made and seconded (and thirded and fourthed) to express condolence at the death of 35 party leaders who had died during the past year, to pay homage to the martyrs of the "struggle of independence" of 1857, to amend the Object of the party to make it more pronouncedly socialistic. Occasionally, as speakers finished their remarks, Nehru would beckon and confer with them sometimes, it seemed, rather irritably, sometimes calmly. The little conferences usually broke up in smiles.

As Nehru finally slowly rose to speak, there was a bustle of excitement throughout the pandal. Delegates who had been politicking in the tea lobby just off the platform began filing back to their places. As Nehru reached the microphone, there was a burst of applause.

Slowly, hesitantly, in the pleasant, passionless voice of a patient school teacher, Nehru began to chat. He spoke at length in Hindi and then "for the benefit of our friends from the South," repeated his message in English. He spoke in easy-to-understand avuncular terms. He talked down to his audience, to be sure, but without the slightest trace of superciliousness. His medium-pitched, medium-soft voice glided up and down the run of phrases, occasionally with a touch of mild scolding, or a vocal shrug of the shoulders when he had, by logical pursuit, run down a "bogus" idea and left it standing bare in its absurdity.

To paraphrase him:

The members of the Congress should, of course, attach the manifesto to the Second Plan. If the Plan succeeds, it will be not only a great victory but a prelude to other victories, because then we will have crossed the dangerous barrier which separates an undeveloped country from a developing one.

The plan is a balanced one which will take India forward along the right lines. It is different from the unbalanced plans of the Eastern European countries which laid too much emphasis on heavy industry at the expense of agriculture. The balance of agriculture, heavy industry and village, household, cottage and small industry is especially important.

Now, our goal is socialism. Some have defined it in a wicked way, but socialism may be of many varieties. We should not copy, but we should take into consideration the lessons of others. I do not see why I should be asked to define socialism in precise, rigid terms when it is something which should not be rigid. Broadly speaking, I want every individual in India to have an equal opportunity of growth from birth onwards, equal opportunities of work according to his capacity. I want the welfare state.

Capitalism has brought a great deal of good to the world, as an improvement over feudalism, but society is outgrowing it too. It is out-of-date and injurious, because a capitalistic structure means some kind of acquisitive society. We have this same tendency ourselves, but we must replace it more and more by cooperation.

This will be a long process. I remember Chairman Mao Tse-tung of the People's Republic of China, which is more or less a communist state though communism

is somewhat adapted to Chinese conditions, saying that it would take China 20 years to achieve some kind of socialism. Mind you, they have got an authoritarian state, too. So, we cannot afford merely to repeat slogans which have no meaning. The process of bringing socialism to India in the way we are doing it, that is, the democratic way, will take time.

We have definitely accepted the democratic process, because we think that in the final analysis it promotes the growth of human beings and of the society, because we attach great value to individual freedom. We want to produce material goods of the world and to have a high standard of living, but not at the expense of the spirit of man, not at the expense of his creative energy, his adventurous spirit, or all those fine things of life which have ennobled man throughout the ages.

Congress is not a monolithic party, although I disapprove of bossism and leaders trying to perpetuate themselves. Nor does India have a one-party system. If the Congress is the dominant party, it is because it mirrors the Indian people. We are the inheritors of history, the history of the last 70 years. Are we to give our support to the candidates of opposing parties or to put up dummy candidates?

I am opposed to the amendments asked for ceiling on incomes. This is an attempt to legislate against the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few. But we cannot produce equality by cutting off heads to reduce everyone to the average height. It is unearned income from wealth accumulated through generations that is bad. The real thing is that we should concentrate on providing a minimum standard for everybody.

There are so many tasks for India and the drawback in a poor country like ours is that it does not have the strength to take up big tasks all at once. It has to progress slowly. Immediate comfort and gain have to be sacrificed for the greater good of all in the future. All these things have to be weighed in the balance.

While the meetings in the "small" pandal were rather restricted little affairs for 8,000 or 10,000, the next day the convention moved into the giant oval pandal for the plenary sessions. By mid-afternoon, some 75,000 people had paid Rs.2 each and filled down the long aisles to places on the ground. The men, most of them turbaned or Congress-capped, many of them wearing long-tailed shirts and loose-wrapped dhotis, generally sat separate from the women, whose saris of white and blazing red and yellow and blue lit up the zenana section where they huddled quietly. Dominating the pandal was the roofed dais, decorated with paintings of temples and village scenes, potted plants, giant papier-mache urns, a statue of Gandhi, a couple thousand Congress flags and a couple hundred Congress leaders.

A vast, powerful voice rose from the ground as the crowd joined in singing the hymn "Bande Mataram." Congress President Dhebar read his presidential address. Nothing new. After a long, hot dull while, Nehru stepped to the speaker's stand, surveyed the throng for a moment, and began his conversation:

How are we to bring socialism to India? Some other political parties accuse us of going very slowly towards the goal of socialism. They say our pace is not fast enough. But socialism is not something that a sect can, through compulsion and force, force down the throats of the people. Everyone must remember that the march to socialism is a pilgrimage not of a few people but of 370 millions of them. All these people have to march forward together.

A big leader of a revolutionary country told me that he had heard of one or two things in India which were remarkable. He said, "You are

a strange people. How do you do these things without any class war or conflict or noise?" I told him, "Do you want big things to be achieved, or heads to be broken?"

There is, of course, class conflict in India. Different classes pull in different directions to safeguard their interests. But the concept of class conflict is out of the question in India because of the entire trend of our Indian revolution through the last 40 years. Revolution does not come about through violent means alone. Robbers and dacoits (bandits) use violence but they are not revolutionaries. Revolution means change in the structure of society. Whether it is achieved by violent or non-violent means is another matter.

The important thing is that socialism in India must have the stamp of its own historical experience, just as the French and Russian revolutions do. Now in the Socialist and Communist parties, there are very good people, honest, courageous, and willing to do hard work and undergo sacrifices. But they are not tied down to their old doctrines that they miss the main currents of life today. The Communists have stayed in the dark for decades, resisting light and free air. I wish they would come out of their holes and see a little bit of the world today.

I appeal to you to take advantage of the election and take the manifesto to the remotest village, explain its contents to the people, and make them realise what part they have to play to bring about the economic advancement of our country.

No sooner had Nehru sat down, amidst cheers, than Pandit Pant tottered to the microphone, sat down, and began to speak. There was a great buzz of inattention. Suddenly, from mid-way back in the pandal, a wave of two or three hundred men came rushing down a broad aisle toward the dais, bent on getting Nehru's darshan, the "blessing" that comes from being greeted by a great man. Police and ushers who tried to restrain the onrush were pushed aside. There was a cracking sound of bamboo railings splitting. Pandit Pant shouted something weakly, Dhebar grabbed the microphone to quiet the crowd. Nehru bounced up, climbed down a couple of steps on the stairs leading to the ground. He was scowling furiously, motioning with both hands, sit down, sit down. The darshan-seekers, crowding around, leaped up and down, cheering. Nehru climbed back to the dais, gazed at them solemnly, then broke into a smile and raised his folded hands in front of his face in greeting. There was a great roar of cheering. The police gradually began to push the crowd into order. Nehru sat down, still smiling.

There were other demonstrations of Nehru-worship at Laxmibai Nagar. Once when Nehru left the small pandal to get a cup of tea, no fewer than 50 ushers, college boys and girls, followed him outside, waited for him and trailed him on his return. When one evening Nehru took the evening meal in a delegates' dining hall, waiters and waitresses crowding to take his darshan knocked over a row of tables and benches.

Even Nehru's closer associates did not refrain from lavish displays of devotion. Speakers praised Nehru as much as they made reverent references to Gandhi. Once, the Defence Minister, in a speech advocating the manifesto, said he was so enamoured of it that if he could, he would like to kiss the hand that drafted it, or kiss the face that dictated it. Nehru, who was reading a newspaper at the time, looked up quickly on that one.

The following day, in another plenary session, Nehru continued his course of lectures. This time there was a bigger crowd and the temperature was up to 80 degrees. A reporter from the Press Trust of India made a sun visor from a copy of The Statesman; one of the men from Tass did the same, but using a copy of Blitz, a pro-Communist weekly. Nehru, shaded on the dais, looked as fresh as a daisy. He began slowly, deliberately. People in the rear of the pandal began shouting. They couldn't

hear. Nehru got the message and replied, "Well, should I be on top gear, the bottom one or the middle sort?" They all laughed, the microphone man twisted the dial, and Nehru began again:

Some amendments to the manifesto have been introduced, but they have no substance. The point was made that Congress should hurry the pace of progress in the country. Should Congress go in a procession to the people and ask them to increase the tempo of their work? Congress cannot impose its will on others. The Congress has to carry the people along with it.

I would like to remind you that in the manifesto there is no attack on any other party. After all, those who are in the Praja-Socialist or the Communist parties had worked in the Congress for several years and bear the stamp of the Gandhian era. They oppose the Congress only in superficial matters. This cannot be said, however, of the communal parties, who want to take the country backwards and not forward. There can be no bridge between the Congress and the communal parties.

Now, some speakers have praised me for the foreign policy of our country, as if I were its architect and this were a new policy. This kind of talk is dangerous and it deludes people outside too. Actually, India's foreign policy has its roots deep in the soil.

Regretably, the cold war is once again being intensified and is spreading more and more. The events of the past few months have jolted hopes for peace. Military threats or alliances will not solve any problem in any part of the world. Heads may be cut off by armed might, but no problem will be solved.

You all know what happened in the Suez Canal. It proved one thing conclusively: that it has been very difficult for a big power to establish its rule through brute force on any other country, however weak it may be. This aggression shook the world, which raised its loud voice against it. So also in Hungary, many things happened which are full of sad things.

Sometimes criticism is made that India has raised her voice strongly against aggression in Egypt by Britain and France, while in the case of Hungary she was adopting a hesitant attitude. I do not consider this to be the correct view. India was in touch with events in Egypt since the aggression started and knew what was behind it. In Hungary, events took place in a different way. Many bad and painful things happened, but the most important thing was not to have India shouting against the events but rather doing what she could to see that the crisis was resolved in favour of the people. We wanted to do only those things which could bring peace to the area, and not make the question more complicated. Our effort has always been constructive, to help in the cause of preserving peace.

This is also clearly evident in India's policy towards Pakistan. Although the U.S. Government has assured India that military aid given to Pakistan will not be used for aggression, the fact is that modern weapons are piling up there. How can we close our eyes to this? India has no desire to join in any race of piling up weapons. She wishes to spend all her funds for the Second Five-Year Plan. I do not think any intelligent Government of Pakistan would declare war against India, but then there are limits to this intelligence, so we are compelled to have weapons too.

I am sorry to say that some people are again looking to the sword more and more and are threatening others with this sword. I would very respectfully tell those countries who have got the longest swords and the biggest guns that their strength is in their hands and the whole world knows about it. It is not something which is hidden from anybody, and brandishing the sword more and

more will not make any further impression on the world. You only make the other side unsheath his sword. The flashing of swords dazzles the eyes of the common people of the world who cannot then see what actually is happening.

Now, the British ruled India but ultimately had to withdraw from the country. But the withdrawal did not create any power vacuum in India. That was because the Indian people were united and to some extent ready to meet any challenge to their newly won freedom.

What does the power vacuum business mean? This theory is utterly wrong as it creates a race among big powers to cut out spheres of influence over other countries and subvert their independence.

If in reality there is a power vacuum in West Asia which has to be filled it has to be filled by the countries of West Asia themselves through their own strength, unity and progress. This is necessary because if any other outside power comes in, then it may give some help for some time but it will sow the seeds of conflict and instead of peace reigning there, there will be a tussle for gaining supremacy in the region among the foreign powers.

Nehru's final address brought the convention to a close. He had spoken privately to gatherings of party leaders during the course of the session and accounts of these talks trickled or were slipped out to the press. In one closed-door conference with the Working Committee he reportedly reviewed for an hour his conversations with Eisenhower, Eden and Chou. At another meeting he is said to have announced that this year he would not be able to rush around extensively on campaign tours--- he was "beyond" that.

In addition to the official convention, there was an unofficial convention going on. It met before, during the after the sessions of the official convention; for many it held a high degree of personal attention. I'm referring to the wrangling, scrapping, lobbying and pleading for party tickets, for the Congress appointment to run for office under its banner.

President Dhebar announced in his first day at Laxmibai Nagar that 1400 candidates of 3500 had already been selected, that the Central Election Committee (CEC) hoped to select some more during the week, and that the final lists would be completed by mid-month. Time was running short, fever was running high. Prospective candidates and their backers followed Lal Bahadur Shastri, the party's election manager, around like chicks after a mother hen.

Ideally, Congress candidates rise up from within the constituencies, are nominated by their District Congress Committees (DCCs), seconded by the Pradesh Election Committees (PECs), and approved by the Central Election Committee (CEC). (However, since India does not require a national legislator to be a resident of his constituency, some constituencies have to accept "out-siders" chosen from the top.)

In the final analysis, however, the system of selecting candidates is largely handled from the top. The system is set up that way. First the CEC has its "standards". There is an examination of a prospective candidate. His "political, social, economic and cultural contributions in the past" are looked into. His "social outlook, particularly relating to untouchability, land reforms, labour welfare and economic justice" are examined. "It should be stated how far the candidate has observed proper discipline in relation to the Congress Legislature Party (i.e. the caucus) as well." Furthermore, "qualifications" include "how far the prospective candidate is ready to contribute towards his (sic) election expenses."

For this year's elections, the High Command is trying something new in order to "achieve uniformity and easy disposal" of nominations. It has dispatched

representatives of the CEC to the PECs for consultations, after which the PECs in turn send their representatives to the DCCs "to ascertain local opinion and help prepare" a panel of names not exceeding five for each constituency. The DCC then sends the names up to the PEC, which meets again with a CEC representative and selects a list of nominees from the DCCs list plus others "in order to give due representation to women, minorities, persons working in the labour field and persons of outstanding ability." This list then goes up to the CEC, which accepts or rejects individual names.

At Laxmibai Nagar, with the gospel of unity and discipline being preached all over the place, I found little public grumbling by individuals of factions who had been denied tickets---what they were saying privately I have no idea. Those who had been OKed for a ticket and were certain of being awarded one were variously contented or joyous. For those still hanging, the suspense was terrible. I talked to a young Punjabi MP, a Sikh, who had not yet been approved by the CEC. We stood in the tea lobby of the pandal and he literally wrung his hands, perspired and stammered while waiting for an interview with a Cabinet minister who is on the CEC.

But ~~once~~ the official convention ended, the unofficial convention ended---or rather moved to New Delhi, where the CEC resumed its sittings. I am going back to New Delhi myself---not to get a ticket though, just a square meal.

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