

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WWU - 12

INDIA: WHO LOVES KRISHNA?

Claridge's Hotel,
Aurangzeb Road, New Delhi.
March 31, 1959.Mr. Walter S. Rogers.
Institute of Current World Affairs.
366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:



MENON: Posed...



and unposed

Before arriving in India, I decided that probably the safest gambit for a visitor in discussing V.K. Krishna Menon was to say: "We have our Mr. Dulles whom many people even in America don't understand; tell me why your Mr. Menon is so controversial?" Well, I am afraid my gambit was a little too successful: I've hardly heard a kind word said of Mr. Menon by his compatriots in the entire two months I have been here. Perhaps that is because Mr. Menon's chief friend and sponsor is Mr. Nehru and I have been unable to get in to see the world's busiest Prime Minister.

But I mean to justify my gambit. Before setting out on my 13-month worldwide tour of the neutral countries, friends of mine in the State Department had declared: "We respect Nehru. We try to understand India. But Krishna Menon, that's one egg we don't trust." This sentiment is echoed in most quarters of the U.S. Embassy here in New Delhi, which I suppose is to be

expected. For my own part, I had seen Menon but once. He was the guest speaker at a Tuesday night Gaston Hall lecture series at Georgetown University in Washington. He told his audience -- almost all students, and apparently interested ones -- that he had no prepared text and would prefer to answer their questions. After that it was like watching a tennis match with all the balls being viciously aced across the net and out of the court before anyone had a chance to see or recover. No doubt Krishna Menon's very position as India's chief spokesman in the UN would make him controversial. But his personality has made listening to his argument only more difficult.

Well, I decided that if I had come to India to better understand her arguments for non-alignment, I had better heard the lion in his den. Krishna Menon's den at this time happens to be the Ministry of Defense, which, for the past two years, has provided him with Cabinet rank. I phoned for an appointment one day and, much to my surprise, was given an appointment for the very next day. Menon was out at the appointed hour, returned to his office a half-hour late and, much to my even greater surprise, he was profuse with apologies. And he didn't even mention the excellent reason he had for being delayed: He had been with the Prime Minister. Almost everything about my interview was a surprise. Menon greeted me hurriedly, dashed off to the john and began talking with me while still buttoning his trousers. He saw that I was seated in a comfortable leather chair, served me tea, kept his voice soft and seemed so relaxed that I am sure he didn't notice the mouse which scurried from under his desk, across the carpet of his paneled office and under the sofa on which he was leaning back. I say "almost" everything was a surprise about this gray-haired, gray-faced, decidedly violent-looking man. Because while he gave the impression of candor, he also came up with some incredible conclusions for a lawyer of his training and brilliance.

On East-West relations: "This country has never been invaded by Russia or China but it has been invaded by Europeans. And also, while the Russians assert the superiority of Communism, they don't try to impose it on us. You don't preach the superiority of Capitalism as much. But you try to impose it here. Why do we lecture only you? You are the ones who are doing the things. It is only your external policies that impinge upon us. Russia? The only things you can criticize them about is what is going on inside their country, and that is none of our business. We have never lectured you on internal affairs except once, when Little Rock came up before the UN and we could not avoid comment. Actually, I was most temperate. However, things were much worse five or six years ago when the U.S. expected us to stand up and be counted. But still, the U.S. takes our politics as though they were talking to their own people. You attack personalities. Russia never does."

On China: "We want China in the UN because she has a right to be. And moreover it is far better that China be in the UN than outside of it. At the UN they all say quietly that the real reason the U.S. is opposed to China's entry is because she is Asian. And after all, you drop atomic bombs on Asia but not on Europe. Of course, I don't believe this is your reason, but that is what others say and believe."

On the UN: "So far as our expressions in the UN, we go very largely on how far we think it is going to be useful and helpful. America and others know now that when we take a position they don't like we don't do it for mischief. Ask my good friend Cabot Lodge. He tells me that all the time. And I think our performance in the last five years has been useful."

On non-alignments: "First you called it 'neutralism,' now 'non-alignment.' Even here people do not always understand it. They speak of a 'Third Bloc,' which is ridiculous. Of it being opportunistic, which is also wrong. And anyway, it is not a policy with very much meaning if a war really broke out between East and West. Then there would be nothing. Certainly both sides -- the East and the West -- would rather have us here in the middle than on the other side. For ourselves, we don't like aligned blocs because they lead to conflict. But NATO is one thing, SEATO is another. At least in NATO the countries involved participated in agreement. In SEATO, without saying anything about it to the rest of us, they would take us under their 'protection' -- and project the opportunity of war in this area. You say that we can have arms too, like Pakistan, if we want them. You can say that back home. But when you come here, you see how impossible it is. (Menon didn't expand on this.)"

On other countries: "We have not exchanged diplomatic representatives with Israel simply because we do not want to offend the Arabs (See WWU-10)...We were for an independent Cyprus as far back as 1954, but I was hooted at, even up to six months ago. Now it is being done."

At the end of my interview, Menon asked that there be no newspaper quotations since as Defense Minister he now is expected to be more reserved. He apologized for being unable to give me more than 30 minutes. Then he told me he was a good friend of my publisher, Phil Graham, of The Washington Post, and what a shame it was that the Post "is so misguided and has to follow the party line." But then he softened: "At least you're not so cantankerous as The New York Times. The New York Times is the worst paper in the world." (Elie Abel, the Times' New Delhi correspondent, told me that his predecessor, Abe Rosenthal, wrote a Times Sunday Magazine profile of Menon which limned Menon so closely to his true dimensions that he has never forgiven Rosenthal, the Times or the American press.)

As I said before, I had anticipated trouble in approaching Menon. An Indian editor in Calcutta had told me that Menon had fallen asleep during his interview with him -- out of pure boredom. Here in Delhi, I was told that when a Government official had chided Menon for insulting a European journalist without any provocation, Menon shrugged indifferently and told him, all right, he would apologize. When the official brought the journalist back, Menon proceeded to insult him all over again! Well, in contrast to this treatment, Menon saw to it that I left my interview with a smile on my face. "Please come back and see me again," he said repeatedly. (Actually, my smile has since paled. I now learn that Menon gave a tea party for Douglass Cater, of The Reporter Magazine, when he was here last year.)

The first person I had a chance to react to after my interview with Menon was my waiter here at Claridge's, one Stoney Michael, a Catholic from Hyderabad. On hearing whom I had seen, Stoney immediately declared: "Krishna Menon good man. From South. He no help fool people."

But I am afraid Stoney, with his regional bias, is a minority of one. In Bombay, G.L. Mehta, the popular former Indian Ambassador in Washington, told me: "Krishna Menon is intellectually dishonest. He never criticizes the East but, on the contrary, goes to great effort to explain and excuse it. I don't understand him."

Why then should Nehru so depend upon him? Well, Frank Moraes, editor of The Indian Express in Bombay and Nehru's biographer, declared:

"Krishna Menon rationalizes the P.M.'s emotions. Nehru thinks emotionally, makes the decision. Then Krishna Menon comes up with the A, B, C's for making it logical." Moraes also said that Nehru, being a shrewd politician, also may be using Menon, a recognized left-winger, to balance a Cabinet he (Nehru) now considers far too conservative to push through such pet projects as cooperative farming.

Here in New Delhi, the Rajkumari (Sri to Kan), a Punjab princess who for 16 years was Gandhi's secretary ("I was with him in spirit long before that"), and for another 10 years Mr. Nehru's Health Minister, mentioned quite casually that her ex-Cabinet colleague was a "Communist." The Rajkumari is one of those dear, gray-haired, comfortable and understanding ladies who always find something nice to say about everyone. And so as I sat opposite her sipping port in her elegant Willingdon Crescent home ("Jawaharlal -- we've known each other since childhood -- asks me to take care of some of the State guests when he gets too busy"), I didn't think I had heard aright. For when I had heard Menon called a Communist by some members of the U.S. Embassy, I dismissed it as understandable frustration. But the Rajkumari repeated her remark: "Oh yes, Krishna was a Communist in England and I think he still is, more or less. He's very politically ambitious. But he is so difficult and gets people so unnecessarily upset and angry. I keep telling him, 'Krishna, why must you?' He just shrugs and says, 'People should understand the facts.'"



THE LADY SAID 'COMMUNIST'

Mino R. Masani, the ex-Congress Party, now conservative, M.P. and bitter Nehru critic (WWU-11), provided a slightly different shading: "Menon is a violent anti anti-Communist without being a Communist himself. He is a liberal in methodology but a Communist in his views. I think he has the attraction for Nehru of a strong mind over a weaker one. Nehru's thinking is more illogical and hesitant."

The Ambassador of another neutral country in New Delhi told me: "Menon provides the brilliance and challenge for Nehru's balanced wisdom. Nehru lacks the incisiveness which Menon, as a lawyer, has. Hence Menon, with his lawyer's training, dares to⁸⁹ further on such things as Kashmir."

In Calcutta, A.C. Banerjee, Assistant Editor of The Hindusthan Standard, president of the Indian Journalists Federation, a leader of the dockworkers' union and no conservative himself, told me: "Menon is kept because of his familiarity with international politics. Although you'll notice that Nehru has never trusted him so far as to turn over to him his own Ministry of External Affairs portfolio. (He is, however, Adjunct Minister of External Affairs.) Actually, the Defense portfolio is not right for Menon either. But Defense is relatively unimportant; we have mainly a police force in India. And Nehru needs Menon to advise him on foreign policy because Menon has the facts. And he sends Menon to the UN because he is a polished speaker."

Whereas Ambassador Gopaldaswami Ayyangar is said to have made a "mess" of India's Kashmir position when it was first presented in 1947, Menon's subsequent seven-hour, 37-minute defense of Kashmir before the General Assembly in 1957 (followed by a faint) enabled him to return to India a national hero.

But American officials reminded me that whereas Menon was fine for Kashmir, Nehru did not permit Menon to represent India at last Fall's UN discussions on Beirut and Iraq -- as much as Menon pleaded to go.

Another Calcutta journalist, Niranjan Majumder, Joint Editor of The Hindusthan Standard, told me that while Krishna Menon may have no political following other than the Prime Minister, Nehru is intensely loyal to him. He said this goes back to the many pre-Independence years in England, when Menon, a successful London lawyer, put Nehru up at his home, introduced him to the right people and "had a major role in creating the 'International Nehru' when the P.M. was just a Congress Party flag waver." At the time, Menon was also head of the India League. Then he accompanied Nehru on his tour of Europe in 1938, edited Nehru's books for their American publication and, after Independence, was (from 1947 to 1952) India's first High Commissioner to London. In this post, Menon's major achievement is considered to be his negotiations which resulted in India staying in the British Commonwealth as a "Sovereign Democratic Republic." Indeed this impatient, volatile man who suffers from both insomnia and a host of ailments, has consistently advocated friendly and close ties with Britain at the same moment he is denouncing the U.S. and praising Russia. To date, he has made not even a whisper regarding China and the current Tibet crisis.

A Tata economist said that a member of the London Daily Worker staff had informed him that Menon periodically "planted" letters criticizing his policy in this newspaper so that he could later crow: "What do you mean I'm not neutral! Look what they say against me in the Communist press." This, of course, is hearsay evidence.

And I'll make no pretense whatever that I have given you a balanced picture of Krishna Menon, for I've had a hard time finding anyone who loves Krishna. And therefore, since I already have embarked on such a one-sided course, I thought you might be interested in the following letter to the editor of The Times of India. It is written by A.D. Gorwala, a former member of the Indian Civil Service who now is an anti-capitalist, anti-communist commentator.

Democracy In Asia

To The Editor, "Times of India"

Sir,--Messrs. Hirji Jehangir D. Idgunji say they find it difficult to believe that Mr. Menon can be a propagandist for international communism and an ardent fellow-traveller. Mr. Menon holds a very important appointment and wields great authority. The national interest, accordingly requires that the correct position should be stated.

It is public knowledge both in England and here that Mr. Menon has been close to the Communists since 1936. As a member of the Labour Party, he was conspicuous for his attachment to its fellow-travelling group. Some of the members of the well-known Communist Front--the League Against Imperialism--worked with him on the executive committee of the India League. The Labour Party, which selected him as its prospective candidate for Dundee, had to reject his candidature when he refused to obey its instructions to disassociate himself from the United Front with the Communists.

His attitude towards World War II followed exactly the Communist line. So long as the Soviet Union's pact with Hitler's Germany continued, to him, too, the war was "an Imperialist war," actively to be discouraged. As soon as Hitler turned upon

the Soviet Union, it became "the People's War" and received his full support. So marked was this that he became extremely critical of the Indian National Congress's attitude in opposing the war. The India League even refused to endorse the Quit India policy. Mr. Menon maintained close contact with the British Communist Party during and after the war.

Nominated a member of the Indian delegation to the United Nations General Assembly in 1947, Mr. Menon took so pro-Soviet a stand that his colleagues were greatly disturbed. His later record in the United Nations fully supports the view that he is strongly pro-Communist. Though the Indian plan on Korea, presented by Mr. Menon was repudiated by the Soviet Union and China, he attempted to blame everyone else for its rejection, especially the United States that had accepted it, rather than the real culprits, the Communists.

For him, even in Hungary the Russians were innocent. He actually described the Soviet aggression, the killing of brave Hungarians by the thousand, and the destruction of the newly-regained independence of a small country as nothing more than ordinary riots very similar to the riots that had taken place in Ahmedabad.

His pro-Soviet activities behind the scenes at this time attracted the notice of several well-known indepen-

dent commentators, generally friendly to India. Said Philip Deane: "Soon after opposing in the United Nations the General Assembly's first attempt to condemn the massacre of the Hungarian people by the Soviet Army, India's U.N. delegate Menon... was asked how he could possibly justify his stand. He shouted: 'Hungary! the Russians should have bombed London after the Anglo-French attack on Egypt!' and he stalked away." Time and again Mr. Menon has indulged in such pro-Communist activities at the United Nations.

Take another example. While on his way back from the United Nations, Mr. Menon declared that Tibet had been Chinese for the last 4,000 years. He can scarcely have been so ignorant as not to know that it was only in the 17th century that the Chinese obtained a hold over Tibet, that, thereafter, whenever the Tibetans could, they drove the Chinese out, and that in spite of the brutal Communist occupation in 1950, many Tibetans are still continuing resistance in outlying parts of the country in an attempt to maintain their independence. Mr. Menon was trying to justify Communist action in seizing Tibet. The question may well arise—whom does Mr. Menon represent?

The Communist Government of Kerala found in Mr. Menon a strong supporter. It in fact may rightly be said to owe its life to him. Chosen by the All-India Congress Committee to maintain liaison on behalf of the Congress with the Kerala Congress Party, he at an early stage firmly op-

posed any understanding between the Congress and the Praja Socialist parties in Kerala. He also called upon Kerala Congressmen not to refer in their speeches to the atrocities committed by the Soviet and Communist Chinese Governments and to the lack of freedom in the lands ruled over by them. Congressmen should confine themselves only to local affairs. He thus deprived them of very effective arguments, relevant and telling because of the well-known link between the Communists in India and international communism. Though, as Mr. Dhebar, the late Congress President, found on his tours, there was a very great deal to complain about in the Kerala Government's and the Communist Party's handling of affairs in Kerala, no criticism of the Communists escaped Mr. Menon's lips. All in all, then, he served very well indeed the Communist cause.

The perceptive Mr. Vyshinsky called Mr. Menon "an honest man." By 'honest' the Communists do not mean 'fair and upright in speech and act'. As for other words like good and evil, for this too he has his special meaning, a meaning best given in Mr. Vyshinsky's own words: "A real internationalist is one who brings his sympathy and recognition up to the point of practical and maximum help to the U.S.S.R. in support and defence of the U.S.S.R. by every means and every possible form. This is the holy duty of every honest man everywhere and not only of the citizens of the U.S.S.R."

A. D. GORWALA.
Bombay, March 1.

Cordially,



Warren W. Unna

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