

INDIA:

Commonwealth Republic

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INDIA took her place in the British Commonwealth on 26 January, 1950, as a "sovereign democratic republic". Previous to that date she had been, since 15 August, 1947, a Dominion—a status conferred upon her when India and Pakistan were granted full self-government on the partition of the British Indian Empire. Both the new countries automatically inherited all the privileges of Dominionhood, including the right to decide their own future either inside or outside the Commonwealth. India acquired her present status of her own free will, and by the willing consent of the other members of the Commonwealth, whose Premiers decided the issue at a conference in London in the spring of 1950. Thereby the Commonwealth Premiers changed the whole Commonwealth concept in order to meet India's wishes, but on balance it was agreed—and rightly agreed—that the Commonwealth gained more than it would have lost if this great democratic country of over 300 million people had been compelled to cut itself adrift from an association dating back to the days of the East India Company.

No one who knows the background of the Indian struggle for complete self-government can fail to sympathise with India's attitude towards the British Commonwealth as it existed before 1949. The Indian National Congress, which

formulated the national demand and fought for it on the basis of Mahatma Gandhi's creed of non-violence, had for years proclaimed as its objective an Indian republic completely severed from Britain. So deeply engrained was this principle in the Congress organisation that even today many Congress members have doubts about the change. But the wise statesmanship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and the other Congress leaders—as distinct from the political immaturity of Burma's national leaders—sought to maintain close relationship with the country which had granted them their freedom without at the same time compromising their political testament. Pandit Nehru put India's attitude in a nutshell when he said that his country had to be a republic, but it desired "some sort of link" with the Commonwealth which would not restrict its freedom.

This was the problem which Pandit Nehru placed before the Commonwealth Premiers; the answer was their acceptance of India as a sovereign independent republic which recognised the King as "the symbol of the free association of its independent members". Broadcasting on his return to Delhi, Pandit Nehru undoubtedly voiced the feelings of the great mass of his countrymen when he declared it was a good augury for the future that the old conflict between Britain and India should be

resolved in a friendly way. By an overwhelming majority the Indian Constituent Assembly, to which the London agreement was submitted, took the same view. The factor which made India's voluntary membership of the Commonwealth possible was Indian gratitude to the Parliament and people of Great Britain for the willing transfer of power. Britons were never so popular in India as they are today.

INDIA'S first task on receiving her freedom was to devise a Constitution. To that end there was set up a Constituent Assembly based on the popularly elected members of the existing legislatures and taking the place of the former Central Legislature. Nearly three years passed before the Constitution was finally adopted "amid scenes of solemnity and joy"; at the end of that time the Assembly produced what is probably the most elaborate Constitution framed by any country in the world. It consists of a preamble, 395 articles and eight schedules, owing their inspiration (in the words of *THE TIMES*) mainly to western political philosophy and more especially to British liberal thought which, from the birth of Indian nationalism in the latter part of the last century down to date, has powerfully influenced Indian leaders. While the federal character of the new Union of India made borrowing from the United States and Canadian Constitutions inevitable, underlying the Indian Constitution are the principles of the British parliamentary system, recalling Mahatma Gandhi's famous remark on an earlier occasion that "parliamentary mentality has come to stay." (This was said at a time when he would have preferred a more revolutionary mentality!)

The preamble to the Constitution reflects the general tenor of the document, and is worth quoting. It runs as follows:

"We, the people of India, solemnly resolve to constitute India into a sovereign democratic republic, and to secure to all its citizens: **JUSTICE**, social, economic and political; **LIBERTY** of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; **EQUALITY** of status and oppor-

tunity; and to promote among them all **FRATERNITY**, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation." Enshrined in the Constitution is an exhaustive declaration of human rights. This was considered essential in view of the need to safeguard the interests of India's many minorities, whose communal representation of British days has given way to a common electorate, based on adult suffrage, enfranchising 170 million people. How this colossal electorate, most of which is illiterate, will discharge its electoral duties is one of the problems facing the new democracy. It represents in truth, a very great experiment.

In structure, the Union of India is a federal republic comprised of States, with a popularly elected legislature at the Centre and in each State. The States are the former British India provinces and Indian Princes' States, or amalgamations of former Indian States. At the head of the Republic is the President, elected by the members of the Federal and State legislatures; at the head of each State is a Governor (or Rajpramukh in the case of former Indian Princes' territory) nominated by the President. From there downwards the machinery of government closely follows the British model. The Federal and State executives are Cabinets responsible to the legislatures, with a Prime Minister in charge. Unlike the President of the United States, the President of the Indian Republic acts on the advice of his ministers except in a national emergency, when he has special powers. Residuary powers, as in the Canadian Constitution, vest in the Centre. The Canadian model is also followed in that the Constitution contains provisions for the units as well as for the Centre. Of special interest to the other members of the Commonwealth is the decision that, while Hindi is to be the official language of the Union, English should for fifteen years be used for all official purposes.

II

IT is one thing to formulate a written Constitution; it is another to have a unified territory to which it can success-

fully apply. British India consisted of British administered provinces and a patchwork of Indian states—self-governing but owning the suzerainty of the Paramount Power—which grew up on the ruins of the Moghul Empire and at different times entered into treaty relationship with the British Crown. With the departure of British authority, these States were left to make their own arrangements with the succession Governments of India and Pakistan. There were no fewer than 565 States, ranging from large and populous territories like Hyderabad to petty estates of a few square miles. They varied tremendously in administration and development. All were in greater or less degree autocratic; several of the larger States were well governed, with popular representation in the legislatures, while others were very backward and very poorly administered. In some States, as in Hyderabad and Bhopal, a Muslim dynasty ruled over a predominantly Hindu population, while in Kashmir, on the other hand, a Hindu Maharajah held sway over a population mainly Muslim.

Clearly this heterogeneous collection of autonomous principalities, with widely differing standards of public administration, had no place in a modern State. Under the strong hand of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the deputy Prime Minister, the Indian States within India's orbit—552 in number—were rapidly brought into the general scheme of things, some willingly, some unwillingly, but all eventually realising that integration in the India Union was inevitable. Only in one case was force used. That occurred in Hyderabad, where a Muslim clique seized power in a state preponderantly Hindu. Whatever the rights and wrongs of India's methods in this particular instance—and India's action aroused wide-spread criticism—the fact remained that the Indian Union could not possibly have in the centre of its territory a hostile regime unrepresentative of the people over whom it ruled. Once resistance collapsed, His Exalted Highness the Nizam came to terms with the Government of India.

The form in which the States were integrated varied like the States them-

selves. Two States, Hyderabad and Mysore, retain their original frontiers; 216 States were merged into neighbouring provinces; 275 States were fashioned into six unions which have become new federal States; 61 States are administered by the Centre; while the future of one State which acceded to India, Kashmir, is still in dispute. There has thus been brought into the Union of India nearly 400,000 square miles of former Indian State territory with a population of over sixty millions. The transfer of political power from the rulers to the Central Government is complete, and this power is now exercised by the people through legislatures. One difficulty has been the dearth of skilled administrators in areas formerly ruled by the Princes and their dewans; this deficiency is being made good by the temporary appointment of Regional Commissioners and Advisers. Some of the former rulers have become Rajpramukhs (or Governors) of the new federal States; others are employed in Government service, but all are in receipt of privy purses from a Consolidated Fund guaranteed by the Constitution. The complete integration of these princely units is a remarkable achievement, reinforcing in no small degree the essential unity of the country.

III

EVER since the Dominions of India and Pakistan were constituted, their attitude towards one another has unfortunately been clouded by mutual hostility. The roots of the *malaise*, which lie deep in history, were responsible for partition, the contention of the All-India Muslim League being that in a self-governing India the political, religious and cultural rights of the Muslim minority would not be adequately safeguarded. This allegation was strongly repudiated by the Indian National Congress, which included some Muslims as well as Hindus, but in the end partition was effected in an atmosphere of intense communal hatred, accompanied by widespread massacres and migrations on both sides of the Punjab border. These tragedies left a grim legacy

of communal ill feeling. Without fresh fuel the hostility might have died down in a few years, but it had been kept alive in a highly dangerous form by several incidents, by far the most serious of which is the dispute over Kashmir State. Kashmir is important to both India and Pakistan because of its position on the northern frontier of the two countries. Pakistan considers that Kashmir should form part of the Muslim Dominion because of the predominantly Muslim character of its inhabitants and its close economic ties with Pakistan. India, on the other hand, claims special kinship with Kashmir because of the support given by the Indian National Congress in the past to Sheikh Abdulla's popular party which, by virtue of the Maharajah's decision, is now the ruling party in the State. Moreover, the Indian Government insists that Kashmir should not go to Pakistan merely because the Kashmiris are mainly Muslims, but that they should be entitled to choose for themselves, without reference to religion, which country they desire to join. The Maharajah's Government had not decided its accession policy when, in the year following partition, Kashmir was suddenly invaded by fanatical Muslim tribesmen whose movements the Pakistan authorities were apparently unable to control.

A few days after the tribal invasion began the Kashmir Government hurriedly acceded to India and asked the Indian Government for armed protection. This was speedily granted. Indian troops were flown to Srinagar, the State capital, where they reached the airport just ahead of the raiders. Leaving a trail of loot and murder behind them, the tribesmen had made extremely rapid progress; rushing up the Jhelum Valley, the main approach to Kashmir from the West, they debouched on to the far-famed Vale of Kashmir and headed towards Srinagar. On the first flat ground of the Vale they were no match for the war-seasoned troops of the Indian army, who drove them back to the Jhelum valley and along it for some distance until increasingly difficult terrain and tribal resistance brought their progress to a stop. Meanwhile the Mus-

lim inhabitants of Poonch, another part of the State adjacent to Pakistan, rose in support of their co-religionists. The onset of winter brought about a stalemate which has continued ever since, with the rebels and their friends holding some western and northern portions of State territory, and the State Government, backed by Indian troops, administering the main bulk of the State. Some time after hostilities began Pakistan troops entered State territory in areas where fighting was in progress on the grounds that the Pakistan Government had to protect its frontiers.

THE dispute was referred to the Security Council of the United Nations, which drew up a plan—accepted in principle by both India and Pakistan—for holding a plebiscite of the inhabitants to decide the State's future. While the "cease fire" under the plan became effective on January 1st., 1949, the U. N. Commission which visited Kashmir to work out the details of the plebiscite failed to secure agreement. It is not within the scope of this article to follow in detail the progress of the dispute before the United Nations; all that need be said is that the two countries eventually accepted, in April of this year, the appointment of Sir Owen Dixon, a distinguished Australian judge, to be Mediator in place of the Commission so as to prepare the way for a plebiscite to be administered by Admiral Chester Nimitz. Men of goodwill everywhere must sincerely hope that the latest plan will lead to a peaceful solution, since it cannot too strongly be emphasized that the Kashmir dispute has poisoned Indo-Pakistan relations since it began, and will continue to poison them until it is settled. With Indian and Pakistan troops both in the field in Kashmir the two countries were, before the cease fire, almost in a state of war with one another. It needs no imagination to envisage the complete disaster to democracy in Asia which would ensue should there be war between India and Pakistan.

How near that danger sometimes is can be judged from recent events in Bengal. Owing to the state of tension between

the two countries, anti-minority riots broke out in April in the Indian State of West Bengal and its neighbour, East Pakistan, accompanied by the flight of thousands of Hindus from Pakistan into West Bengal, and of thousands of Muslims from West Bengal into East Pakistan. Highly inflammatory articles appeared in the newspapers on each side, with open talk of war by extremist parties. It was here that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, and Liaquat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, rose to great heights of statesmanship. They met in Delhi and evolved an elaborate plan to safeguard in future the interests of minorities in both their countries. In return for Liaquat Ali Khan's visit to Delhi, Pandit Nehru shortly afterwards went to Karachi to discuss further outstanding problems, including inter-Dominion trade, which had reached a deadlock owing to Pakistan's decision not to devalue her rupee in terms of sterling devaluation. Nevertheless, so strongly had feelings in West Bengal been roused that two Bengali members of Pandit Nehru's Cabinet resigned in protest against the "appeasement" of Pakistan. India and Pakistan are fortunate in having at their head two Premiers of the calibre of Pandit Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan. Their continuance in office is one of the best guarantees of peace between their two countries, and of the survival of democracy in Asia.

IV

INDIA'S unhappy relations with her closest neighbour cannot, however, obscure her assured status both in the Commonwealth and in world affairs. The coming of political freedom found her with a strong popular Government at the Centre and popularly elected Governments functioning in the provinces. Thanks to the "Parliamentary mentality" to which Mahatma Gandhi referred, there was built up during British rule a system of democracy and of democratic institutions which gave India marked stability. That stability coupled with her democratic,

background, enabled the country immediately to play her full part in the councils of the Commonwealth and the United Nations. From the outset of her career as a completely self-governing unit, India has been on terms of the closest and most friendly understanding with Great Britain. The long contact between the two countries and the goodwill which characterised their political settlement, made this remarkable accord possible. As a member of the present British Government put it, their minds work along the same lines and in affairs of state they talk the same language. India's relations with the other members of the Commonwealth, with the exception of Pakistan and South Africa, have been uniformly excellent. When, for example, Pandit Nehru visited Canada during his tour of the United States, he was deeply touched by the warmth of his reception from the Canadian people which, it was remarked, had a real family atmosphere. Even in the case of South Africa, where the Union Government's treatment of its Indian citizens and the Union's racial policy generally are strongly resented, Pandit Nehru put the issue in a nutshell when he said that the quarrel between India and the Union was a family affair, capable of being dealt with on a family basis. In his contacts with his fellow Premiers of the Commonwealth at the 1949 conference in London, Pandit Nehru earned their affection and esteem, thereby adding not only to his own personal stature but to that of his country.

INDIA'S voice is also heard with respect in the United Nations, where her spokesmen are invariably found on the side of the smaller nations and of subject peoples everywhere. The part already played by the Indian Government in international affairs is illustrated by its intervention in the Indonesian *impasse* early in 1949. Following Dutch military action, Pandit Nehru took the unusual step of inviting thirteen Asiatic, African and Pacific countries to a conference in New Delhi, and it was to him a source of great satisfaction that the recommendations of the conference were very much on the lines ultimately adopted by the United Nations. India has indeed

entered fully into all her United Nations responsibilities.

In the field of foreign policy, Pandit Nehru's Government pursues a cautious course. During his visit to the United States last year on the invitation of President Truman, the Indian Premier was repeatedly pressed to declare himself specifically on the side of the Western Powers. His invariable reply was that while India gladly welcomed mechanical and technological aid and cooperation on terms of mutual benefit she did not desire to align herself with a particular nation or group of nations. But, he added, "where freedom is menaced or justice threatened or where aggression takes place we cannot be and shall not be neutral." Nor does Delhi's attitude of detachment, which Western observers may find puzzling but which has its origin in India's recent history, mean that the Government of India is neutral in its dealings with Communism in its own country. Stern action is taken against Communists and others who openly advocate the overthrow of popular government by violent means. The progress of Communism in Asia is undoubtedly as much of a worry to India as it is to the Western democracies. Should the Communist Government of China bring Tibet under its ideological sway by force, as it threatens to do, India will have a Communist State on her borders, although divided from her territory by the main Himalaya range. Her future, as well as that of Pakistan and Ceylon, will be watched with concern not merely by the rest of the Commonwealth but by the whole Western world, since the three countries constitute—with India as the centre—a bulwark of democracy in an Asia either Communist or directly menaced by Communism.

V

INDIA'S economy has been subjected to severe strains and stresses since partition. When the two new Dominions were formed, they were left a good legacy by the British Government. They had hand-

some sterling balances to their credit as the result of the war, and India has a highly developed textile industry, big iron and steel works (the Tata Iron and Steel Company), a flourishing tea industry and an almost completely nationalised system of railways and irrigation. But partition unbalanced India's economy by giving to Pakistan jute, cotton and food producing areas. India thus found herself in the same position as Great Britain, with her imports greatly exceeding her exports. Her main problem is food. Despite its huge size, pre-partition India imported food, mainly rice from Burma, but this shortage became much more acute for the new India when Pakistan broke away. A recent estimate put India's food deficit as four million tons a year; in the last financial year it was expected that India's adverse balance of trade would be in the neighbourhood of Rs. 180 crores, or roughly £135 millions sterling. In an endeavour to redress this adverse balance the Government of India inaugurated a food production drive on a large scale, Pandit Nehru's avowed aim being to stop food imports entirely by 1951. On the advice of Lord Boyd-Orr a coordinated food plan embracing the Centre and the federating States was adopted last year. By more intensive cultivation, reclamation of weed infested and new land, tube well irrigation and the diversion of acreage under sugar cane, among other methods, it is hoped to increase food production by nearly $4\frac{1}{2}$ million tons by the end of next year. Nobody expects that India will become fully self-supporting in food by that date, but there should be a substantial reduction of the present food deficit. In her uphill task India has received a loan of ten million dollars from the International Bank for the purchase of agricultural machinery to bring weed infested land under cultivation. Her difficulties are augmented by the rapid rise in the population, which grows at the rate of over three millions annually.

Along with Great Britain, India became involved last year in the dollar crisis. The devaluation of the pound made a similar revision of the dollar-rupee rate almost unavoidable, although Pandit Neh-

ru, announcing the fact, emphasised that devaluation was only a palliative and that India's economy depended on increased food production. Pakistan's decision not to devalue her rupee—based on the fact that her economy, thanks to her primary products, was balanced—caused serious repercussions in India by completely upsetting all commodity payments. The political ill-feeling between the two countries over Kashmir undoubtedly prevented a friendly settlement of the devaluation problem, with the result that complete chaos in their trade relations soon developed. There was witnessed the ridiculous spectacle of India seeking raw cotton from overseas, of Pakistan ordering coal from South Africa, and of tea being flown from the Bengal and Assam gardens because it could not be transported by rail across East Pakistan. Happily the rapprochement between the two Prime Ministers which followed the communal outbreak in divided Bengal led to a similar agreement in the economic field. Both Governments endorsed terms reached by their delegations in Karachi at the end of April according to which Pakistan will sell raw jute to India and take in return Indian manufactures. The agreement, which lasts for three months in the first instance, is hailed as an initial step in the revival of trade on a balanced basis between India and Pakistan.

IN addition to increased food production and the revival of trade with Pakistan, India is now tackling her third hurdle in the race to balance her economy, namely, the scaling down of inflated Government expenditure. Here again strained relations with Pakistan are responsible for defence costs far beyond the normal requirements of both countries. Drastic pruning has meantime been effected in capital expenditure schemes. Simultaneously with a cut in costs and the arresting of inflation the Government of India is stimulating industrial production. Foreign countries are being encouraged to invest capital in the country; factories in which British, American and Swiss capital is interested are being planned for the manufacture of machine tools and of

heavy electrical and radio plant. To assist output, the International Bank has loaned India 18½ million dollars for the Damodar Valley project in Bihar and West Bengal. By this project it is hoped to develop electrical energy so as to increase India's coal production and at the same time lower its cost. Planning on a large scale is also being undertaken by a National Commission, its object being the coordination of the country's economic development. At the end of last year, India's Finance Minister, Dr. John Matthai, was able to express the hope that the country had tided over its worst economic difficulties. The devaluation of the rupee has led, as in Great Britain, to a rise in exports, and early in May of this year it was announced that India had practically balanced her foreign trade in the first nine months of the current financial year.

While foreign capital, as already noted, has continued to play its part in India's industrial development, Indian capital has not done so to the same extent since partition. This was due in the first years of independence to a feeling of uncertainty among industrialists, business men and the investing public concerning the industrial policy of the Government of India. It was feared that the aim of the Congress Party administration was to foster a "Welfare State" by wholesale nationalisation of industries, by widespread controls, by extravagant concessions to labour and by vast Government-promoted development schemes. Inflation added to the general nervousness by continuing at an alarming rate. More recently conditions have changed for the better. The Government, realising that neither Indian nor foreign capital—both of which are needed—is encouraged by wholesale nationalisation and control, has modified its views on those projects. In his last Budget the Finance Minister went out of his way to reassure industry, and it is the general view that owing to a shortage of technicians, if for no other reason, the Government is unlikely to consider the nationalisation of industries other than those already announced. Legislation to control industries now before the Central

Assembly is to be radically amended, and some of the Government's costly development schemes have been dropped because of the clamant need for retrenchment in public expenditure.

Thanks to Government support, labour conditions have improved tremendously in recent years. The result is that Indian labour is no longer cheap. Nevertheless, instead of going ahead immediately with a national health service as the Labour Government did in Britain, the Government of India has wisely decided to hold an inquiry into its feasibility and the extent to which such a scheme could be supported by both Government and the public.

VI

TO sum up, the new India, a member of the British Commonwealth by her own free will, already has taken her due place not only in the Commonwealth but in the world. The astonishing thing is not that she has had setbacks and difficulties—these were inevitable—but that her progress has been so great in so short a time. With a population of nearly 350 millions, India is bound to play an increasingly important role in Commonwealth and international affairs.

Internally she is preparing for one of the greatest experiments in democracy ever attempted—the enfranchisement in 1951 of over 170 million people, the vast majority of whom are illiterate, in a country-wide general election. That election will determine the kind of Government that is to succeed the present one, which was chosen by the Congress leaders as representatives of the largest political

body in the country. Already there has been a break away from the Congress of its left wing elements, who recently formed a Socialist Party. At the other end of the political scale are the right wing communalists, represented by the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Shevak Sangh, whose emphasis is on India as a Hindu State with a correspondingly stiffer attitude towards Pakistan. It does not seem at the moment that any of these parties will displace the Congress at the next elections, although they may gain in strength.

But the greatest hope of India—as well as of its neighbour Pakistan—is that the two countries should live in peace and amity. The chances of them doing so have been immensely fortified in recent months by their agreements over the minority problem and on the resumption of trade. Addressing a joint meeting of Indian and Pakistan newspaper editors at Dehli early in May, Pandit Nehru declared: "It is inevitable that within the next few years India and Pakistan will not merely be two countries friendly to each other but will come far closer to each other than friendly countries ordinarily are." He went on to develop the theme that India and Pakistan should evolve a common policy in external affairs as in defence, so that, acting together in friendly alliance, they could play a powerful role not only in Asia but in the world. Therein Pandit Nehru showed not merely true statementship but political vision. The two countries are essentially one in that their interests are fundamentally the same. It is by a recognition of this fact that they can best serve their own people, the Commonwealth and humanity.