

# The Greatest Show In India

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NEW DELHI  
AT THE END of its first year's run, India's first popularly elected Parliament is still playing to packed galleries.

Looking down on a meeting of its lower and more important chamber, the House of the People, from the press galleries is like having a balcony seat for history. We can see when Prime Minister Nehru cracks his knuckles in agitation, when two ladies in white cotton saris tuck their feet up under them on the stiff-backed benches, and when the gentlemen toss off their loose slippers and sit barefoot. We can watch the Opposition leaders passing notes to backbenchers, and watch the Prime Minister yank at the coattails of one of his Ministers to make him stop speaking.

Below us is India. There are Rajput and Sikh turbans and Muslim black caps. There are men from southern India in sarong-like skirts and men from northern India in dhotis hiked up between their legs like giant diapers. There are dapperly dressed men in western business suits, and there are sporty types in English blazers with old-school insignia on the pockets. There are women in white homespun cotton and others in rich silks. A saffron-robed swami leans back with his eyes on the pigeons that are flying around the dome above. A maharaja in a gay printed silk sports shirt leans forward with his elbows on his desk. A Hindu sage, with a long white beard and his long white hair curled at the ends like a Hollywood star's, shuffles through a file of papers. And sometimes, when she isn't attending sessions of the United Nations, Madame Pandit is there, look-



ing sophisticated and even regal in her sleeveless choli.

THE INDIAN Parliament has everything from slapstick comedy to moments of high solemnity. The Prime Minister rose to speak recently just after there had been a good deal of noise and ruckus from both the Communists and the Hindu communalists on the Opposition benches. When Nehru mentioned Gandhi, there was complete silence for a full minute throughout the House while the Prime Minister himself struggled to regain control of his voice. Even the Communists, whose faces often show scorn or cynical amusement when the Prime Minister speaks, stared earnestly at Nehru.

By way of contrast, there was a noisy battle not long ago in the House of the People over the arrest of two Members in Delhi for leading a procession of political agitators. The arrested M.P.s were leaders of

the communal factions—the religious groups who on almost all counts fight to put India into reverse. But civil liberties were at stake, and so that day the religious communalists were joined by all the other Opposition groups—from the Communists through the nonviolence Gandhians and Socialists to the independents, whose numbers include several maharajas and tribal leaders, a “cotton king,” and a maharani just out of purdah.

The Speaker ruled the whole question out of order, since it was a municipal matter, but the Opposition wouldn't be silenced. The louder the Speaker banged his gavel, the louder the Opposition shouted. A Hindu Mahasabhaite began waving his fists and delivering a speech at the top of his lungs. Members of Nehru's dominant Congress Party banged their desks and tried to drown him out with their own shouts.

The Speaker soon motioned to the khaki-turbaned marshal. In the end the Mahasabhaite and the Communists, the two political extremes in Parliament, walked out in protest against the Speaker's ruling. It was a good show, and even the Congressmen would have enjoyed it if the Speaker had not then delivered a twenty-minute lecture on parliamentary behavior in the angry tones of a severe schoolmaster.

For steady comic relief, however, there is always the Honorable Member from Assam, who sits wrapped in a great white shawl with his long wisps of black hair standing up at all angles like a crop of unruly horns. The boys in the press gallery have been talking of taking up a collection to buy him a comb. His fa-

vorite subject is women. He brightens whenever the subject of women's rights or protective legislation for women comes up. Then he sings out his own demand—legislation for men, to protect their rights against women.

**T**HERE is also pathos. Muchaki Kosa, Member from Bastar in central India, put his head down on his desk in the House on the final day of the last session and sobbed aloud. Kosa was elected by the people of a tribe of which he is the chieftain. But he knew no English or Hindi, and he could neither read nor write; and so the maharaja of the area had offered to lend him a secretary who would guide him through the parliamentary intricacies.

It had been an unhappy alliance. The secretary, according to Kosa's tearful accounts, had appropriated his traveling allowance, forcing the duly elected Member of Parliament to ride third class, as if he were a servant. Then the secretary had taken over the house allotted to Kosa in Delhi and had condescendingly allowed the M.P. to sleep on the floor of the veranda. Finally the secretary had appropriated the M.P.'s forty-rupee (\$8.40) per diem. The unhappy tribesman had attended Parliament conscientiously, even though he had understood nothing of the proceedings.

So far Kosa has not left the protective care of his fourteen wives to attend the current session. But there are others in the new Parliament who are almost as lost as Kosa was,



a handful of M.P.s who understand little of English and little of Hindi, the two official parliamentary languages. There they sit—mute representatives of a newly enfranchised people.

All this does not mean that India's new Parliament is not a serious legislative body with huge problems and stirring decisions to face. Yet there are a good many reasons why this body, chosen by the peasants and the landlords, the sweepers and the bankers, the artisans and the merchants of India, has become a sort of staged display of the nation's wit and anger, of its emotions and conflicts.

### The British Mold

Here is India's diversity, together with the struggle to make a nation out of that diversity. Here are India's British heritage and the rebellion against it. Here is the political turmoil which puts Communists and right-wing Hindu communalists on the same side of the battle one day and at each other's throats the next, and which gives the Congress Party a strangle hold on the political life of the country.

This Parliament dramatizes, perhaps better than anything else could, the vast diversity which is both India's great charm and one of its major problems. The very clothes of the Members show their regional differences. Their caps and turbans show their religious differences. Even their difference in philosophical outlook can be measured after a fashion by a comparison of the lengths and the unruliness of beards and hair.

For the five-hour daily sessions of Parliament, this diversity that is India is stuffed into a mold as typically British—and as typically un-Indian—as boiled mutton.

The benches on which the M.P.s sit were built for straight-backed British colonial officers. Indian robes and postures have a way of making the new occupants look stiff and uncomfortable. The parliamentary procedures, rigidly British, seem at times a painful fetter on the volatile temperaments of India's M.P.s. The language and even the literary allusions are part of the British mold. Of the two official languages, English is used more frequently, because it is still



the most universally understood language in many-tongued India.

Recently an Opposition Member rose to attack the Government's foreign policy—a favorite topic. His main point was that it had sold itself, unwisely, to the western powers. To prove his point the orator drew heavily upon western literature. In about fifteen minutes he managed to call the House of the People "Heartbreak House," to quote Robert Burns, to refer to the Old Woman in a Shoe and to "Mary Had a Little Lamb" (eliciting a chorus of "baa, baa, Black Sheep" from the Congress benches), to call the Five-Year Plan "A Streetcar Named Desire," and then for good measure to toss in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" with a crack about Uncle Sam's current preference for dark Oriental beauties.

Another Opposition M.P. makes all of his speeches in English verse. Here is a sample:

*The budget on waterways  
Is soaring like a rocket;  
It does not irrigate the field—  
It irrigates the pocket.*

Other Members find nothing humorous in the language problem. Purushottamdas Tandon, the bearded, ascetic former president of the Congress Party, spoke recently for forty minutes in Hindi berating the railway administration for printing



its timetables in Arabic instead of Hindi numerals.

AT NO TIME has the contrast between the British mold and the Indian emotions been so marked as it was during the incident of the flag. On Queen Elizabeth's birthday last year, during the first session of the new Parliament, M.P.s arrived for their early-morning session to find the Union Jack flying over Parliament House. The Communists promptly demanded an explanation from the Government.

The entire discussion was conducted in the finest parliamentary tradition. ("May I know, Sir, if the Government . . .?") The Speaker ruled the question out of order, and the two Communist questioners—one a history professor, the other the niece of the Chief Minister of Bengal—accepted the Chair's ruling gracefully, but that was not the end of it. During ensuing debate on foreign policy, the flag incident became a pet illustration in Opposition speeches of the Government's "subservience to the Anglo-American bloc." Was it for this, some of the Gandhians asked bitterly, that India had won independence? Even though emotions ran high, approval of the tense, recriminatory speeches was expressed in discreet desk thumping and an occasional "Hear! Hear!" The incident was finally settled when the Prime

Minister agreed that in spite of India's membership in the Commonwealth, the British flag should not be flown over the building where India's Parliament sat. It had been, he said, a "grave mistake." Amid a display of impeccable British manners, anti-British sentiment triumphed.

Frequently, however, the "Sirs" are forgotten and the desk thumping turns into shouting. One battle which burst the confines of parliamentary procedure ended when a Communist M.P. was forcibly ejected from the council chamber by the khaki-turbaned guard. An entire group of M.P.s in the Opposition often grabs its briefcases and stalks out of the House in protest. Nor is the Prime Minister always able to control his quick temper.

### Strange Benchfellows

There are those who bemoan the present Parliament's lack of dignity. They compare it disparagingly with the last Parliament, an appointed body chosen from among the best brains in India to draft the new constitution and to lay the legal framework for the new republic. James Michener called it ". . . the finest, most dignified and intellectual governing body I have ever seen in action." It was disbanded when the present Parliament was elected.

Parliaments have been convened in India without a break for over

fifty years. In that time, to be sure, there has been a revolution. The British have given up their seats on the Government benches, a new independent republic has been formed, and a constitution has been drafted and adopted. But there has been a continuity. Though the all-Indian Parliament has evolved from an appointed body to a popularly elected one, it has done so within a framework based on traditional rules and procedures, with the technical help of a Parliamentary Secretariat.

BUT THE revolution is not yet complete. India's new Parliament has no real Opposition in the British sense, with a history of administration and a reasonable prospect of coming into power again in the future. The Communists and their sympathizers now number twenty-seven out of the 497 representatives in the House of the People. The Praja-Socialists—the new union of Socialists and the Gandhian K.M.P.P.—have twenty-two votes. The rest of the Opposition is made up of still smaller parties and of independents, "every one of whom," according to one of their number, "is a nonco-operator."

These benchfellows have little in common. Their most concerted fight was against the Preventive Detention Act, which gave the Government extraordinary police powers, ostensibly to quell terrorism and violence. Nobody in the Opposition trusted this legislation and all feared its abuse would curb civil liberties. For once the divergent Opposition groups voted together.

But their vote was less than one-fourth of the total vote. The Congress Party, which has become a more disciplined group than it was in the previous appointed Parliament, voted—as it always does now—in a solid bloc.

The Opposition groups know that they have not even a gambler's chance of affecting legislation by vote. The only thing they can do is make noise. That is one reason why the Parliament in New Delhi is such a good show. When it becomes less of a show, it will have moved further along in its evolutionary process of becoming a responsible legislative body.



# The American Liberal: After the Fair Deal, What?

ERIC F. GOLDMAN

TODAY the most authentic American liberal is, more than likely, educated beyond the average and decently well off, perhaps a youngish lawyer, an employee of some community organization, a teacher. He measures politicians by the memory of Franklin Roosevelt, cherishes his "Pogo," shushes the family at the first gravelly words of Elmer Davis. He is intelligent, well informed, public-spirited, and miserable.

Things were to have been so different. As the Second World War neared its end, the American liberal had the confidence of a man who believed he was riding with history. He looked back over the past, the great effort against fascism, the reform surges touching every continent in the 1930's, the achievements of social democracy stretching in an almost unbroken line over the centuries, and he saw the whole modern era as one in which the world had been moving toward credos of popular rule, social amelioration, and internationalism. The successes had been slow and they were certainly tortuous, but all around them was a tonic air of inevitability.

The American liberal drew special confidence from the fact that the United States would be so powerful after the war. In the years when Wendell Willkie's *One World* was breaking sales records and the White House was announcing a sweeping "Economic Bill of Rights," it was not hard to believe that America had gone through a Roosevelt Revolution, with permanent effects in both domestic and foreign affairs. Hadn't the nation grown accustomed to using governmental powers in a continuing effort to widen economic and social opportunities and to buttress



personal security? Didn't it seem prepared, however reluctantly, to commit itself to the internationalism represented by the United Nations? And withal, the liberal had reasons to believe that a substantial part of the American people had taken over his zest in jousting with the past, his skepticism of the businessman, his winking assumption that respectability and authority are probably mere guises of a reluctance to think.

THERE WERE nagging worries, of course. The debacle of the League of Nations was not encouraging; the backwash of war might easily give the Old Guard another chance in the United States; there was the fact of a powerful totalitarianism, Communism. Even during the Popular Front enthusiasm of the 1930's, a good many American liberals had been leery, and the cynicism of the Nazi-Soviet pact of August, 1939, was not casually overlooked. But after the Soviet Union had thrown millions of men into the war against Nazism, when the New Deal President and Stalin were meeting in a way that suggested genuine understanding, the leeriness was accompanied by a

strong counteremotion. The Soviet Union was easily accounted a spearhead of peace and reform—bump-tious and totalitarian, no doubt, but likely to modify its own dictatorship, assertive in the "right direction" on the world scene, and certainly a friend of collective security. Whatever the disturbing possibilities, liberals could reassure each other, they were all mere possibilities and limited problems at that. The overarching fact was the centuries-old world trend toward democracy, social reform, and internationalism.

The troubles came with jolting rapidity. V-J Day celebrations were hardly over when the nations began rushing into the kind of blocs that threatened to squeeze liberalism into irrelevancy on the international scene. Inside the United States, the East-West struggle was creating an atmosphere that made liberalism seem irrelevant, or worse than irrelevant, to millions. While a new defense boom was dulling economic and social concerns, the previous faith of many liberals in the Soviet Union gave a field day to the McCarthys, who now could go thrashing up and down the nation with the charge that liberalism is treason's seedbed.

## The New Conservatism

To compound the liberal's difficulties, a new American conservatism was perfecting its formula. In recent years, practically everyone, or at least practically everyone seeking national approbation in the United States, has become something of a liberal in the old Rooseveltian sense. The general proposition that America must play a continuing role in the world is accepted. The need for attention