

The 'Modern Minds' Of India Today

An exclusive report on the politics of science and development

This in-depth account of the political process in India was written by Daniel Sneider, head of the Executive Intelligence Review's Asia desk, following his return from a visit to India. His analysis is the result of discussions with Indian leaders, including an exclusive interview with former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (published in full in EIR Vol. V, No. 20).

On a hot morning recently in the Indian capital of New Delhi, a leading member of the Indian parliament spoke about the situation in his country and the state of its leadership: "Morarji Desai, Charan Singh—these men do not have modern minds."

This was the sharp assessment of Khrishna Kant, referring to the Prime Minister and Home Minister of the Janata party government. Kant, a long-time parliamentarian, is himself a member of the Janata, the ruling coalition of five parties. Despite his white hair and long political experience, he is known as one of the Young Turks, a group of members of the Congress Party who left that Party in opposition to then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's declaration of a state of emergency in 1975.

Kant's special province in Indian politics is science. He was in the forefront of the push for Indian scientific advancement for many years, and he served as a charter member of the parliament's science committee and head of its newly formed committee on atomic energy. Kant spoke emotionally about the "zeal for science" displayed by the late Indian leader and prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. He bemoaned the gradual loss of that zeal, characterizing Indira Gandhi's commitment to science as strong, but "instinctual," lacking her father's deep intellectual ties to science.

Kant used his parliamentary vantage point to drive home that idea. During Nehru's day, the Prime Minister always attended the meetings and seminars of the science committee, he said. Indira Gandhi's attendance was far less consistent. Today, when the "zeal" is totally absent, Kant said he had trouble rounding up enough members of parliament to form the committee on atomic energy.

Kant's views were echoed from another standpoint by Dr. Nag Chaudhuri, the vice chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University and an eminent Indian nuclear physicist who has played a large role in the development of that nation's huge nuclear research and energy program. The soft-spoken scientist was evidently frustrated by the present lack of direction for Indian scientific development. At one point he contrasted the frontal role of science during the Nehru era with the

present situation: "The scientists and politicians no longer have a common ground; they sit across the table from each other but they don't communicate."

Dr. Chaudhuri strongly believes that India must give priority to nuclear energy development if the nation is to have a future. He has no quarrel with India's existing commitment to nuclear energy, the greatest in the developing sector and the source of much trouble between India and the United States. Chaudhuri's only complaint is that India's nuclear program does not go far enough. "Fusion and fast breeders," says the Indian physicist, "are where we have to make an effort now." The problem as he explained it is money, the failure of even the ardent advocates of nuclear energy to look into the future, beyond the technologies already in their possession.

Science and Politics in India

The views of these men on the importance of science in India today are not intended to be representative of the prevailing opinion in New Delhi circles. Nonetheless, their views are absolutely correct.

The issue of India's commitment to scientific and technological development of industry and agriculture is the most important dividing line in Indian politics today.

Nehru on the "Modern Mind"

"The modern mind, that is to say the better type of the modern mind, is practical and pragmatic, ethical and social, altruistic and humanitarian. . . . A few seers and geniuses, looking into the future, may have a completer vision of humanity and the universe; they are of the vital stuff out of which all real advance comes. The vast majority of people do not even catch up to the present day values, though they may talk about them in the jargon of the day, and they live imprisoned in the past.

"We have therefore to function in line with the highest ideals of the age we live in, though we may add to them or seek to mold them in accordance with our national genius. Those ideals may be classed under two heads: humanism and the scientific spirit. . . . There is a growing synthesis between humanism and the scientific spirit, resulting in a kind of scientific humanism. . . . The earnest scientist of today is the prototype of the philosopher and the man of religion of earlier ages."

—Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 1945
(written while in a British prison camp in India)

The lines are not drawn so much along partisan divisions as across them. In the various parties there are those in the political leadership who locate themselves as part of the legacy of Nehru's belief in the necessity of Indian modernization and industrialization and those who look to some idealized Gandhian image of a rural India, based on its villages and wedded to the land.

The current Desai government is the first in post-independence India to publicly question the Nehru tradition and policies. Home Minister Charan Singh, whose political base in the BLD party lies among the rural landed elite of northern India, has identified Nehru as his enemy and has attacked his opponents within the Janata party on the basis of their support for "heavy industry."

Prime Minister Desai, who served as a minister for Nehru when he was a leader of Nehru's Congress Party, is reluctant to express himself in these terms, and, on occasion has even deliberately praised Nehru. But Desai lacks any commitment in depth to Nehruite scientific industrialization that would serve as an effective bulwark against the current assaults on that tradition.

At times the debate in India takes on an almost Talmudic quality. The advocates of an antiindustry policy and of rural backwardness wrap themselves in the mantle of Mahatma Gandhi, India's famous independence leader, whom they represent as the "true" Indian leader. Even Krishna Kant punctuates his remarks about what India must do with frequent references to Gandhi, pulling down from his bookshelves volumes from which he finds a quote from the Mahatma to prove his point. However, for Kant, Gandhi is not against industry and science, but a nationalist revolutionary advocate of social justice, whose rightful successor is Nehru.

Rural Backlash

What remains when the surface is removed from this debate is very clear. The present Janata regime does not represent the actual core of the Indian nation—although parts of it do—but rather a retrograde development, and expression of cynical backlash against the errant path taken by Indira Gandhi and the Congress Party in the period of her state of emergency rule.

If the regime continues along its current path, including the dangerous trend toward dismantling of key government institutions like the Planning Commission, it will only usher in further chaos and instability. Ultimately, such chaos could be resolved only by the disintegration of the Indian state itself or by the imposition of a military-fascist rule that would make the Emergency period pale in comparison. There is considerable evidence, and it is a popular opinion in Indian circles, that this is no mere scenario but the actual intent of certain forces within and outside of India.

The policy of rural emphasis, as contained in the government's new draft five year plan, is the main expression of this danger. Certain Indian officials were quick to point out that the actual figures on the proportion of budgetary expenditures going into agriculture compared to industry represent a shift of no more than about 5 percent. Yet, when pressed these

officials admitted that the atmosphere created by the government's propagandist emphasis on rural life, a direct implementation of the World Bank prescription for the developing sector, is already acting to discourage any new investment, both public and private, in industrial production. Officials of the Indian Investment Center, a semiofficial body to encourage foreign investment and to seek opportunities for Indian trade and contacts abroad, were hard pressed to dispute this point in discussions held in their New Delhi offices.

Although few would admit as much, it is obvious that the emphasis now so glibly expressed in many Indian circles on "employment creation" in rural areas, "appropriate technology," and so on is a declaration of surrender to the World Bank and the bank's enforcement of the British antitechnology policies that date back to the colonial period. In following the World Bank along this path, certain Indians are expressing their fundamental loss of faith in the ability of science and industry to transform a rural nation into an urban industrial one. For some this is honest confusion and frustration over the slow pace of this process in this nation of some 650 million; others merely continue a long history of service stretching back to the days of the British Raj, which based its rule on the perpetuation of Indian rural backwardness, a land-tax system, and the creation of a local elite through which they could rule.

"Indian Renaissance" and the American Role

The restoration of a scientific outlook among broad layers of the Indian leadership and population requires what Krishna Kant called "an Indian renaissance." India is fortunate to have a modern reference for such a scientific renaissance in its freedom struggle against British imperialism and in the efforts of Nehru, a great intellectual and humanist, to lay the foundations for a modern state.

The political ingredients for a renaissance are found among all the parties, but principally among the ranks of the Congress Party, the traditional party of the Indian national movement. The Congress is now split into several factions. One is led by Indira Gandhi, who is staging a strong political comeback and who is undeniably the most dynamic political leader in India today. Another is the regular Congress Party, headed by the veteran leader Swaran Singh, and itself divided by those who look upon Mrs. Gandhi as a threat and those who favor reemergence of the party. A third faction consists of those Congress members within the Janata coalition who broke with Mrs. Gandhi over her Emergency rule but who have few differences with their Congress colleagues on basic issues of Indian economic development.

Of the latter group the current Defense Minister, Jagjivan Ram, is best known. Ram is an old leader from the independence period who still commands considerable respect and following and who is the main rival of Charan Singh and of the communalist Hindu chauvinist — and fascist — elements of the Janata. (These are the Jan Sangh party and the militant RSS organization.)

Among all of these Congressites are common political

aims, although quality of leadership is severely lacking and it will take work to overcome the significant resentment against Mrs. Gandhi. To these elements one must add the principal parties of the left — the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party Marxist (an early 1960s Eurocommunist splitoff) — which now rule in the state governments of West Bengal and Kerala (a CPI-Congress coalition), and have strong influence elsewhere.

The shape of the political situation in India will be increasingly determined by the intersection of two connected processes: on the one hand, the breaking apart of the Janata coalition, and on the other, the re-coalescence of the Congress Party and its ties to the left. The pace of these processes is neither assured nor predictable, but the fact that both are occurring is the baseline of political life. The extent to which the Indian political leadership makes the real issues—science and industry versus the World Bank's rural zero-growth squalor—open for all to see is the question that intelligent observers will watch closely.

The Fanatic Reaction

The march of the prodevelopment faction in forcing Congress Party unity as rapidly as possible will be matched by the deliberate efforts of the fanatic Jan Sangh-RSS grouping to take over the shell of the Janata apparatus and government. The RSS is constantly feeding off the factional tension in the Janta toward this goal, cynically encouraging Charan Singh's battles against the Ram tendency (including Janata Party president Chandrashekar), while looking eventually to Singh's and Desai's political demise. The RSS pursues its Chinese-style manipulation with greater determination than many will admit. And as the RSS moves, an ugly tide of regional tensions, communal violence, and caste antagonisms rises in its wake.

Americans in policy-making circles, business, and elsewhere can ill afford to view these events lightly. The victory of the prodevelopment forces in India is essential to the future of the entire developing sector, of which India is so large a part and so important in its traditional leadership role. The success of industrial development in India is the key to American involvement in that development, specifically because it will provide markets for our technology and capital goods.

Today, American business has a bad image in India, even among those who look favorably upon foreign investment. Americans are viewed as quick-buck artists, consumed by a fear of nationalization. This fear is what the Indians say motivates the American desire for investments that bring in quick profits with little long-term involvement in the economic growth of India. In fact, in conversations with high government officials concerned with these questions, the only countries to come in for praise were West Germany and, of course, the Soviet Union. Specifically noted was the greater willingness of German firms actually to transfer technology on a large scale, without piddling concerns.

It is useful for Americans to place themselves alongside the Indians fighting today for the legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru and to recall the American role in aiding the Indian freedom struggle against the British

during the World War II period. Many Indians vividly recall the open sympathies displayed by American GIs stationed in India for their cause—in strong contrast to the behavior of the British soldiers—and in particular they recall Nehru's warm feelings for President Eisenhower.

One veteran of the Indian struggle for independence, who is also a longtime communist, recalled a wartime incident when he was the leader of the Congress underground at his college in India, a college with an American president. One day the British police launched a raid on the campus. A phone call from the president to a nearby U.S. airbase quickly brought several truckloads of armed American GIs who kicked the British, complaining bitterly of "interference," off the campus.

The same spirit must animate the American approach to India today.

Nehru on the U.S., the Soviets, and England

"The United States and the Soviet Union seem destined to play a vital part in the future. They differ from each other almost as much as any two advanced countries can differ, and even their faults lie in opposite directions. All the evils of a purely political democracy are evident in the USA; the evils of a lack of political democracy are present in the USSR. And yet they have as much in common—a dynamic outlook and vast resources, a social fluidity, an absence of a medieval background, a faith in science and its applications, and widespread education and opportunities for the people. . . . Thus in both countries the essential basis for a progressive, democratic society is present, for no such society can be based on the rule of a small intellectual elite over an ignorant and apathetic people. Nor can such an elite long continue to dominate over an educationally and culturally advanced people. . . .

"Yet another common characteristic of both Americans and Russians is that they do not carry that heavy burden of the past which has oppressed Asia and Europe, and conditioned to a great extent their activities and conflicts. They cannot, of course, escape, as none of us can, the terrible burden of this generation. But they have a clearer past, so far as other people are concerned, and are less encumbered for their journey into the future.

"As a result of this they can approach other peoples without that background of mutual distrust which always accompanies the contacts of well-established imperialist nations with others. . . . Most of the European nations are full of mutual hatreds and past conflicts and injustices. The imperialist powers have inevitably added to this the intense dislike for them of the people they have ruled over. Because of England's long record of imperialist rule, her burden is the greatest. . . .

"Another era of imperialism, or an age of international cooperation, or world commonwealth: which is it going to be in the future?"

— Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*