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## COMMAND PERFORMANCE

NEVER had an open session of the Congress been held under such circumstances nor had one attracted so little attention from the people at large. The crowd at the Delhi session of the Indian National Congress was smaller than that which usually gathers whenever Pandit Nehru addressed a public meeting. And yet, both the setting and the circumstances under which the Congress met were symbolic: and pregnant with meaning, if one looks for it. The session had to be held under the open sky as the pandal which had been raised for the purpose had been burnt down the night before and an assassin's bullets had removed from the scene Liaquat Ali Khan only two days before the special session was to be held. As Liaquat had been the joint author with Pundit Nehru of the Delhi Pact which had been drawn up to arrest the mounting wave of communal passion and to put an end to the tension between the two countries, the sad event naturally cast a shadow of gloom which was not possible to dispel. Not unexpectedly, therefore, Pandit Nehru dispensed with the printed address he had prepared for the special session and spoke extempore instead, with an attack on communalism as his central theme. Not hunger, not the burning question of land reform, not even the tense international situation was the first concern. Even the question of Kashmir was subordinated to this main issue. The coming elections hardly bothered the Congress President at all.

Among the side-lights were the presence of Acharya Kripalani by special invitation on the dais and the impassioned speech of Shri Purshottamdas Tandon against communalism in support of the main resolution before the Congress. And yet though the setting was so symbolic—the open ground on which the session was held was still strewn with ashes—there was nothing to suggest that a new spirit was being born or that like the phoenix, a new Congress would arise from the ashes of the old.

The open session had been robbed of interest because the matters that were to be placed before it had already been discussed threadbare so that there was nothing new in them, to which the country could look for light or guidance. The resolution in the Subjects Committee on the economic programme was a rehash of the same Five Year Plan which had been rushed through the last session of the Parliament and had aroused so little excitement or response. Precisely the same, applies to the resolution on foreign policy which would also be moved in the same manner and would no doubt obtain the same unanimous approval at the open session that it got in the Subjects Committee or in Parliament. The special session of the Congress is a command performance and it differs in no way from the routine approval which Pandit Nehru always gets whether it be inside Parliament or at the AICC or elsewhere. The under-current of popular discontent, however, was not assuaged by these periodic exhibitions. This continuing conflict between profession and practice remains unresolved,

The Presidential address was sit its best on questions about which

## Conflict At Canal Zone

the country is least interested—on the question of reorganising the United Nations Organisation, for example. Pandit Nehru was forthright in his demand that the UNO should be brought into closer consonance with the spirit of the Charter by giving it a wider appeal and bringing it into closer touch with reality. This means, to begin with, the admission of China into it.

Bitter experience has driven the lesson home to us what a danger communalism can be to the stability and future growth of a country where the population is as heterogeneous as it is in this country. It is not possible for us to forget that the pattern of our culture has developed historically on the basis of acceptance of differences. The stand which India has taken by remaining alert and stamping out all manifestations of communalism and by refusing to countenance it in any shape or form, Pandit Nehru believes, has helped the people of Pakistan to get rid of their war fever. He was happy to note that that high fever was now subsiding. Others may not share his belief, but even so, does communalism still remain the greatest danger facing the country? If it does, then as President of the open session of the Congress, Pandit Nehru should have been more explicit. For his crusade is not against religious bigotry which remains hidden in the secret crevices of the hearts of the bigoted but is against the lurking political clanger. Had he been more specific about the roots of communalism today, he would have helped better its eventual elimination. In the absence of any such light, the emphasis on communalism adds to the confusion instead of making things any clearer.

If by any chance Pandit Nehru was thinking of the grave peril in which Pakistan may fall because its erstwhile champion of the Delhi Pact is no more, even then he should have been more specific. The Delhi Pact, at the time was forged, may have represented the highest measure of sanity and agreement that was possible in the circumstances. It has been tried and found wanting. If the violent end of its architect in Pakistan pressages an upsurge of a fanaticism that can bode no good for the stability and the well-being of Pakistan herself, the country would have welcomed a more determined lead from him.

Only a future historian will have all the evidence and data to conclude whether the two characteristic developments of the second half of the twentieth century were distinct political trends, or were merely different, but related, aspects of one and the same political trend. To a contemporary historian the "cold war" between Communist Russia and the Western Powers represents the traditional bid by rival powers for world domination. It is significant that each bloc accuses the other of imperialist designs. Communist Russia is suspect in the East. But it is admitted that Communist expansionism is not a case of military conquest, but a spreading impact of ideology. That is how the second political development of the second half of the twentieth century—the emergence of the East—becomes related, and is refracted, in the fight between the major Powers for world supremacy.

Whether or not the two political developments are reflections of one fundamental revolution of this period, it is not without significance that the clash of interests between the Western Powers and the East occurs precisely at points which are of strategic importance in the fight for world domination between the Western Powers and Communist Russia. In Asia the metropolitan Powers have transferred political power. But there is the undercurrent of economic hostility between them and their former colonies and dependencies. Imperialism has retreated from Asia, but there is a suspicion that it may come back in another garb. Except in Indo-China there is no direct clash or conflict. But the uneasy relation between India and America is reflective of Asia's suspicion of the Western Powers.

In the Far East the situation has taken a different twist. There the conflict is more direct. Red China remains outside the comity of nations. Japan has been won over to the camp of the Western Powers through the bribe of a peace treaty. There is a war in Korea. Although the United Nations is at war against the Communists in Korea, the Far East regards America as the foreign Power interfering in her internal affairs. In the Middle East it is Britain which is resented as the dominating foreign Power. There is a lull in Asia; the Far East remains in turmoil; but the world's

attention is at the moment focussed on a flare-up in the Middle East,

It all stems from the divergent claims and interests. To the Western Powers, Korea, Japan, the Suez Canal zone and the Nile Valley are strategic outposts; the Middle Eastern oil and Asian raw materials are sinews of war. To Asia, the Far East and the Middle East, the withdrawal of the British army from India is interpreted as freedom from foreign political domination; the revolution in China is hailed as the end of that country's semi-colonial status; the conversion of Japan into an American bastion is resented; America is hated as the foreign Power which bolsters up reactionary Chiangs and Rhee's at the cost of war and bloodshed; Britain is resented as a dominating foreign Power which exploits Persian oil; the existence of her troops at the Suez Canal zone and the joint control over the Sudan are regarded as galling reminders of Egypt's non-sovereign political status. Throughout this region, the Western Powers' eager hunt for air and naval bases is opposed as a device to involve these areas, against their will, in the "cold war" be-



*Founded by Acharya J. B. Kripalani*

The VIGIL is an independent political weekly devoted to the service of the nation. Edited by Krishna Kripalani, it contains articles and editorials of enduring interest and provides the liberal approach to the political problems of the day. Besides, it contains reviews, cartoons by a staff artist and Correspondence from London, Bombay, Bengal, the South and from Pakistan.

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