



Marantz.

INDIA: TRAVEL NOTES

British Communist leader meets Mohandas Gandhi, V. Patel and Ali Jinnah, attends political conventions and even a TIME and LIFE cocktail party.

By R. PALME DUTT

April 2.

THIS morning the All India Radio came to ask me to broadcast for ten minutes as "India's Guest of the Week," with the proviso that the talk should not be political. I swallowed the proviso with the most benign affability, well knowing that the official mind regards politics as a peculiar isolated compartment concerned with elections, parties and constitutions and has not yet realized that any intelligent conversation nowadays is political. Next, the Indian Institute of International Affairs, the counterpart here of Chatham House, arrived to invite me to lecture. Hard on their heels arrived the Indian Council of World Affairs, which is a parallel body based on the Indian national movement, with Nehru as one of its vice-presidents. In accordance with my strictly impartial position here I accepted all three invitations.

April 3.

IN NEW DELHI there is a Rural Uplift Exhibition in the grounds of the Viceroy's house. The organizers have worked with enthusiasm. There is a striking demonstration of the technical changes which could be made to improve Indian agriculture, of the new machines that could be used, how better seeds could multiply production, how land could be reclaimed, the improvement of farm buildings and housing and amenities and water supply. I asked what was being done to bring all this to the villages. The director said, "Alas, nothing! There is no money. This is only a model exhibition. We cannot even bring our exhibition to the villages."

In one section were shown samples of a model minimum balanced diet with the current prices. Seeing the model diet for an industrial worker, I asked the director how much it would

cost an industrial worker with a wife and three children at present Delhi prices. He made the calculation and said Rs. 130/- a month. The top wage for a skilled textile worker in Delhi, including war allowances, would be Rs. 60/- a month, while the average level for an unskilled worker would be more like Rs. 30/- a month, and even as low as Rs. 20/- a month. A primary teacher gets Rs. 15/- a month or less than 5s. a week. Lest it be thought that these low money figures are counterbalanced by low prices, it is worth noting that the present price of milk in Delhi is 4d. a pint.

When I returned I opened my newspaper and found the following advertisement:

"For Sale
'INDIA HOUSE'

IDEAL FOR MAHARAJAS, RAJAS,
EUROPEANS, ZAMINDARS,
CINEMA STUDIOS AND BANKS



"Don't get excited Cuthbert—I said 'wicket' not 'picket'!"

A palatial modern bungalow with a compound of about 30 grounds

FEATURES: Marble and patent stone flooring, artistic marble and teakwood staircase with rosewood railings; drawing-room, ballroom, bedrooms, dining-room and sitting-room, furnished with up-to-date furniture; real Persian and Bokhara carpets, marble statues and stands; ceiling fans and concealed lighting; frigidaire; hot and cold water to supply six bathrooms; pumps with three electric motors; a well-laid-out and illuminated garden; tennis court; water fountain with automatic changing colored lights. Offer above rupees FOUR LAKHS (£26,000) will be considered."

Meanwhile the wheat ration in Delhi has been reduced to one-half from April 8. This means a cut from twelve ounces a day to six ounces a day. And in Calcutta an official communication has been issued to allay alarm about deaths from hunger. The official statement denies the report that out of the twenty-three unidentified dead bodies picked up from Calcutta streets during the week ending March 30 five died of starvation. The official view is that only two of these died of starvation.

April 4.

THE early bird catches the worm. This also applies to meeting with Mr. Gandhi. He fixed his appointment

with me according to his usual practice, at 6:30 this morning. However, I was not in luck. After we had begun our talk Congress president Maulana Azad arrived and we had to break off for another time. Insisting, with the usual gracious friendliness which endears Mr. Gandhi to all his visitors, that he was really most keen on continuing this talk, he promised that he would fix a further appointment at the very first available moment and added, "You may look into my eyes and see that I am sincere." He was as good as his word and within a few days we were able to have a very interesting talk for an hour.

Among other things, we were able to talk of the question of communism and the Congress and he expressed the friendliest good will with regard to my hope that the existing difficulties might be overcome. He told me that he had had talks with Indian Communist leaders and that he admired their devotion and ability, but that he felt an "impassable barrier" between himself and them. Puzzled at this, I enquired whether he felt any "impassable barrier" in speaking to me. He replied that he did not and that he felt full confidence in speaking to me. Probing the matter still further, I ventured to enquire what was this impassable barrier. He replied that it

arose because the Communists believed in "secret force." On my asking for enlightenment on this, he explained that he understood that the Communists were in the habit of kidnapping and assassinating their political opponents. I endeavored to explain that Communists had conducted a very long and famous and on the whole successful campaign against those revolutionary sections which believed in the use of assassination as a political weapon and had indeed succeeded in converting many of the former terrorists in a number of countries, including India, to Marxism. Mr. Gandhi replied that this was Stalin's method of dealing with his opponents. I endeavored to explain that there seemed here to be some confusion with a very different question, namely, the action of a state; that every state has its criminal code and deals with offenders according to that code and that the Congress state would do the same: "No doubt," said Mr. Gandhi, "but the Congress state will not be my state."

From the above, and many other talks with Indian leaders, it is clear that some of the simpler misconceptions about communism, which were growing a trifle crude for the Primrose League twenty years ago and recall the high old days of Bolo, and the man with the bomb, are still widely prevalent in this country, where political cast-offs from other lands sometimes tend to silt up as in a back-water. Apart from Nehru, very few of the Congress leaders have at any time had much contact with international affairs; and even Nehru has to a considerable extent lost touch. As he confessed to me in the first talk I had with him, he had not read any newspapers for three months and had not followed international happenings.

One of the difficulties of the situation here, that has been strongly borne in upon me in the course of talks with all kinds of representatives, is that the enforced isolation of India during six years of war has very greatly weakened contact with the general advance of the world democratic movement. The absolute monopoly of all news of the outside world solely through London semi-official channels inevitably colors opinion here and has made anti-Soviet prejudice easy, since the other side of the case is never presented. Not a single Indian newspaper has a correspondent in Moscow or to my knowledge anywhere in Europe,

apart from London. Indeed, at a conference I had with Indian pressmen the first question they asked me was how it could be possible to arrange to get a correspondent in Moscow since there were no diplomatic relations between India and the Soviet Union. There is a real hunger for information, but the absence of supply leads often to unconscious acceptance of what is really imperialist anti-Soviet propaganda.

This was comically illustrated when at the Moslem League Legislators' Convention Sir Firoz Khan Noon, a former government minister and a man of no high political repute, created a sensation by threatening that if the British did not give them Pakistan they would turn to Russia to get it. This naive acceptance of British imperialist propaganda of the Russian bogey as the big bad wolf waiting to stretch out its paw to India has been so dinned into the public consciousness that when an Indian politician wishes to be really naughty he threatens to turn to Russia; and every Indian major political organization tries to make this charge against its opponent. Nothing else also could explain the extraordinary passage in Nehru's new book, *The Discovery of India*, just published now in 1946 and being read at this moment on all sides, where he actually declares that all the Communist Parties, outside the Soviet Union have failed through losing touch with national sentiment and have consequently become weak and ineffective through their divorce from the nation. He showed keen interest when I endeavored to indicate to him a little of what has been happening in Europe during these recent years. There is no doubt that much work will have to be done in rebuilding contacts between India and the world democratic movement.

April 5.

TODAY I have been among the legislators of the Central Assembly. After observing the debate from the President's gallery, I had "tea on the terrace" (that is, in the inner courtyard of the Council Chamber) with the leader of the Congress Party, the Chief Whip and others, including Chaman Lal, singularly unchanged from Oxford days. It was a pleasant tea, but some of the minor practical disadvantages of the toga-like national costume which is today de rigueur for patriotic representatives was revealed when a

waiter dropped the tea-service on the ground and soon after the cut feet of dignified legislators were having to be swathed in bandages.

All parliaments tend to be the same, and the Central Legislative Assembly is no exception, with the passionate interpellations and the frigid or evasive replies of ministers, relieved by the customary bonhomie and light humor of the Minister of Information, Sir Akbar Hydari (also singularly unchanged from Oxford days and with a Swedish wife). The only superficial difference (apart from the complete and open absence of power of this assembly) is that the acoustics are a little worse than usual, with the whirring of thirteen electric fans overhead, and that the European officials on the front bench speak more like borough councillors than ministers.

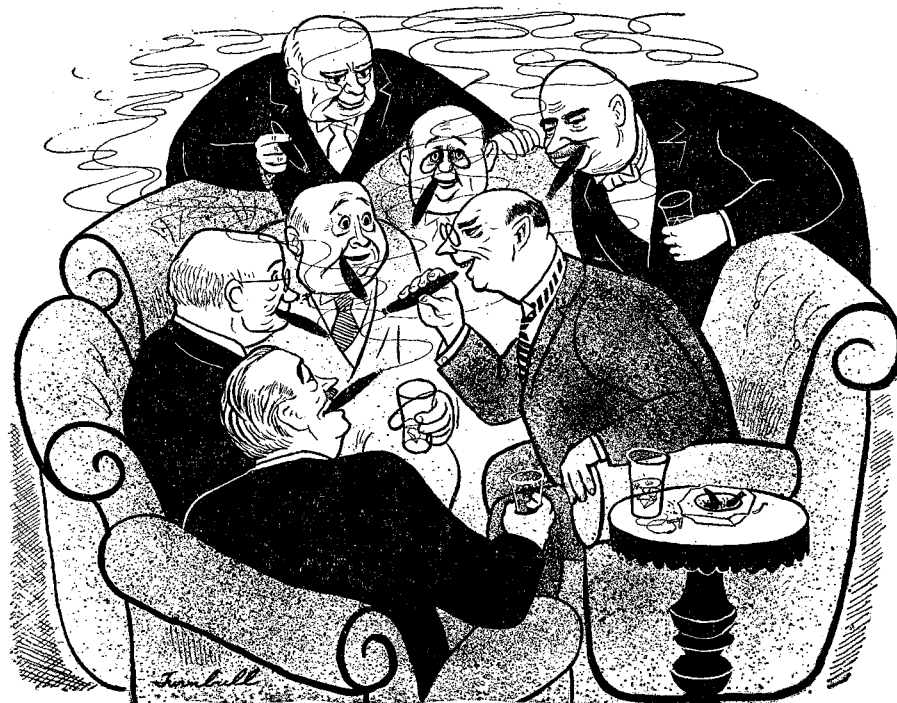
April 6.

A VISIT to Old Delhi affords a welcome relief from the horrors of New Delhi. Here in the center of the old town, by the mosque and the bazaar and where the Communist Party Office flies the Red Flag from the mast on their building overlooking the town square, is teeming life and all the colors of the East. In the crowded streets it is impossible not to notice the rarity of old people and the abundance of babies and children with their large sensitive eyes and beautiful faces, everyone of which an artist would love to paint. As I looked at them

laughing and playing, there swam before my eyes the words of the standard official economist of imperial India, Dr. Anstey, "How can we stem this torrent of babies?" How, indeed, can we stem this torrent of criminal "economists" who, instead of doing their duty to show how to adapt social organization to the needs of human life, proclaim as the teaching of science to the world how to suppress human life in the interests of a vicious social system. From this outlook it is not such a far cry to Hitler's gas chambers and incinerators for the extermination of millions of human beings as the grand solution of the social problem.

April 7.

THE Moslem League Legislators' Convention opened today. There was some shouting of slogans from the younger spectators; but as one looked at these placid, comfortable legislators in the main body of the assembly it was difficult to see in them the stuff of as incipient civil war. Compared to an English or American political gathering at a moment of excitement, the atmosphere was tepid. Despite the somewhat exaggerated fiery speeches (the most fiery of them, that of Suhrawardy, the Prime Minister of Bengal, in moving the main resolution, had been, as the latter explained to me when I asked him for enlightenment on some of his more bloodthirsty passages, "Of course a little rhetorical")



"We're all in competition, and that brings prices down—get it?"

this did not seem yet to have the smell of Ulster, 1914.

One minor feature about this convention, which might strike an outside spectator as odd, but which is, in fact, I believe, common to other political conventions here, including Congress, was the ostentatious display alongside the platform of the wealthier patrons who had paid high prices for their seats of honor. There they lolled with an air of fatuous self-complacency before the admiring audience in comfortable seats beside the platform, while over their heads was a conspicuous label marked Rs. 50/- (over £3). This plain designation of the fat stock with marked prices is an example of the engaging frankness of Indian politics which accompanies all the transparent duplicity and corruption. In English political organizations it is also not unknown for wealthy donors to be rewarded with conspicuous positions on the platform, but they do not carry the ticket of the price paid in their hats.

April 9.

A LONG talk with Vallabhbhai Patel, the famous "boss" of the Congress. There is no doubt that he is the strongest of the Congress leading team; he knows what he wants and how he proposes to get it; and it was refreshing to talk to him in contrast to the cloudy phrases and generalities which so often befog Indian politics. He is recognized by the Left as the most dangerous representative of the Right Wing and of big business interests and is frankly determined to crush all opposition which he may find in his way. The methods of the powerful machine he has built up, especially as shown in the recent elections, are by no means those of Gandhist purity or non-violence. At the same time his political judgment should not be underestimated and his devotion to the cause of the Congress and his closeness to Gandhi are unquestionable. It was characteristic that when we came to examine together some of the questions of communism and the Congress, while other Congress leaders had all dwelt entirely on the ancient controversy of 1942 or the question of Pakistan, he concentrated attention on what he obviously recognized as the decisive issue, the naval rising and the Bombay mass movement, to which he proclaimed his opposition. Nevertheless, he also expressed full friendliness to the desirability of reconciliation with the Com-



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munists and letting the past difficulties be buried; and I carried away the impression from this as from other talks that although in India there are undoubtedly difficulties and dangerous signs which may increase, the lines are not yet so absolutely rigid, nor is there yet the same venomous fanatical anti-Communist hatred as with the old type of European Social Democracy or the kind of Transport House representative who would not be able to mention the word communism even in a talk with a foreign visitor without getting a fit of apoplexy.

April 10.

TODAY I recorded my broadcast for the All India Radio. . . .

All India Radio is a spacious and modern equipped building which was completed in 1943—thus showing that official India did not allow itself to be unduly discomposed by the war against Japan ("Thank God, we didn't have to invade Japan" said a senior military officer to me on one occasion; "our part of it was being organized in India and the mess would have been unholy.") On being shown around I asked my guide how they grappled with the problem of the famous 220 languages of India. He smiled and showed me a list of their Indian transmission services. Ten languages covered, he said, over ninety percent of the population. These were Hindustani, Pushtu, Punjabi, Bengali, Assamese, Gujerati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Mayalam. For a population of 400,000,000 this amounts to rather less than a similar number in Europe.

The same evening I received a shock. I had really imagined that the horrors of New Delhi struck everyone in the eye. At a cocktail party given by *Time* and *Life* and attended by a curiously mixed assembly, from Alexander and government ministers and high military officers to Nehru and Mrs. Naidu, as well as the common fry of

journalists, I found myself in conversation with an elderly government official perspiring in a boiled shirt and mentioned to him that I had visited the A.I.R. that afternoon and noted the modern equipment of the building. He replied in melancholy tones, "But do not you think that that building is sadly out of keeping with the harmony of our architecture in New Delhi? After all, when we have achieved a really distinctive design of architecture in New Delhi it is such a pity that it should be marred by an unsuitable building." Thus the truth dawned on me that there really exist admirers of the gaudy white city architecture of New Delhi. Evidently it has been built to impress the Occidental mind.

April 12.

AN INTERESTING talk with Cripps, who spared me half an hour at the end of a full day (all the more full since he continues to handle Board of Trade matters from here). The interior of the Viceroy's House carries a curious musty air of Victorianism in the furniture and decoration, which is somehow expressive of the spirit of Anglo-Indian officialdom. The talk proved illuminating on many points with regard to the genesis of the Mission, its methods of working, his own judgment of the different political forces in India and the perspective for the future. Not all the judgments of the political situation in India or predictions of the future evolution of Congress and of Indian politics seemed to me entirely justified, but they threw much light for me on the current British official policy and the probable outcome of the negotiations.

April 13.

TONIGHT there took place in the center of Old Delhi a meeting called by the Nationalist Moslems (Congress supporters) and I was naturally interested to see the response. It was attended by 80,000, who sat cross-legged on vast pieces of matting arranged on the ground. The meeting began at 9 P.M. Towards midnight Nehru turned up and spoke. The principal speaker, a distinguished Muslim Urdu orator, whose classic purity of diction is said to hold audiences entranced irrespective of politics, spoke for six hours. The meeting broke up at 6 A.M. It is characteristic of the isolation of foreign journalists here that next morning, when I attended a customary little Sunday morning

gathering of about a dozen foreign journalists, including the representative of *The London Times* (a rather embittered representative whose acid judgment is that "there are no democrats in India"), the *New York Times*, the *B.B.C.*, *Daily Herald*, *News-Chronicle*, etc., I found that none of them was aware of this meeting having taken place and in view of their unquestioning acceptance of the official thesis of Moslem support of the League as 100 percent, were considerably surprised to hear of the size of the meeting and its peaceful character.

It should be added that next evening the Moslem League held a meeting which was attended by 120,000. Probably the major portion of both audiences were the same. But both meetings went off in a perfectly peaceable manner. The atmosphere of incipient civil war is perhaps not quite as tense as some interested propaganda, which dwells on stories of the reported wholesale buying of knives and sticks in New Delhi seeks to insist; though undoubtedly an unfavorable future development may lead to grave results.

April 14.

A THREE hours' talk with Mr. Jinnah. Next day my fellow journalists greeted me with the jibe, "So you are in the Court circular!" It appears that the Moslem League organ *Dawn* carries a small rubric, "Qaid-a-Azam," recording underneath the guests re-

ceived and other activities of the great man during the previous day. The conversation covered much ground of interest, but did not provide the basis of an interview for publication. I had taken the opportunity to ask Mr. Jinnah some of the questions which are often raised by Left opinion in England with regard to the program of Pakistan, and he very kindly gave me full answers which I noted down. He promised to look them through subsequently to see whether it was suitable for publication. Next day, however, after seeing my notes he agreed that they were a perfectly correct record of what he had said and a perfectly fair summary of his views, and that they contained no confidential matter other than his publicly known views. On being invited to make any deletions, additions or alterations he might wish he said there was nothing to change. Nevertheless he did not appear to relish the idea of these questions and answers without comment appearing in cold print; and he found himself unable to consent to publication.

April 17.

THE memorandum presented today by P. C. Joshi of the Communist Party to the Cabinet Mission has had an excellent press and won very favorable opinions from the most varied quarters. It is a clear, practical, constructive and (what is less usual for Communist publications here) concise

document. Mr. C. Rajagopalachari is reported to have said that it represents, of course, the only real solution to which they will all have to come in the end, but may take some years to reach. Devadas Gandhi, whom I happened to meet on the eve of his departure for London and America in search of newsprint, asked me if I had written it. I explained that I had never seen the document until it appeared, and asked his opinion of it. He replied (and his opinion is worth noting, since this son of Gandhi and editor of the leading Congress journal, the *Hindustan Times*, is no friend of the Communists) that he thought it a first-class document. The document kills stone-dead the sedulously fostered myth that the Communist Party of India has placed itself behind the official program of Pakistan and the Moslem League. Of course, the usual process now happens. The Communist Party policy of national self-determination clearly set out in the 1942 resolution and again in the election program was universally distorted by hostile critics as 100 percent support of Pakistan. As usual, the hostile headlines won the ear of ninety-nine percent of the public who never saw the actual policy statements. Now that the memorandum to the Cabinet Mission has compelled recognition of the real policy, the wise-aces wag their heads and say, "ah, the Communists are coming to their senses at last!"