Chapter Six

POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA, 1947-57
The Objectives Resolution and After

On 15 August 1947, the Dominion Status was accepted by the Congress as a matter of temporary convenience and perhaps as a political expedient. It in no way prejudiced the right of the Indian Constituent Assembly to decide whether or not to remain within the British Commonwealth. By its Objectives Resolution the Constituent Assembly had declared India to be an Independent Sovereign Republic. It seemed to many that this was inconsistent that a Republican India should remain in a British Commonwealth, for membership of which allegiance to the King of the United Kingdom was considered to be an essential condition. The one analogy of the inter-war years seemed to point in the same direction. That Eire was not named a republic in the Constitution of 1937, as Professor Mansergh pointed out, "partly in order to avoid forcing the question of secession at that time." The Professor remarked, therefore, that "Outside India the Objectives Resolution was ... interpreted as a declaration of India's intention to secede (1) from the Commonwealth." Yet it is to be noted that Pandit

---

Nehru while moving the Objectives Resolution alluded specifically to Irish precedents, remarking that the House would recall "that ... in the British Commonwealth of Nations to-day, Eire is a Republic and yet in many ways it is a member of the British Commonwealth. So, it is a conceivable thing. What would happen, he did not know, because that was party for the House and partly for others to decide, he said.

Indian constitutional experts like Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Sir B.N. Rau, the Constitutional Adviser to the Constituent Assembly, also believed that a republic could be accommodated in the Commonwealth. Mr. E. de Valera, Prime Minister of Eire, subsequently endorsed Nehru's views. Speaking in Dail Eireann on 24 June 1947 he said: "The Irish Constitution is a republican Constitution. That we are a republican State here, nobody can deny. We are a republic."

The Times of India, a well-informed and pro-British paper


(3) See Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru to K. Iswara Dutt, 16 December 1946, Sapru Correspondence, National Library, Calcutta.


at the time, commented that the republican conception was not inconsistent with membership of the Commonwealth "not merely on the analogy of Eire but because in practice the Dominions functioned as independent sovereign republics."  
In his subsequent statements Pandit Nehru, chief spokesman of India and the Congress on foreign policy, further indicated that the Objectives Resolution did not indicate India's intention to break away from the Commonwealth and that India's continued membership in the Commonwealth was not unthinkable. Replying to the debate on the resolution, he referred to the Independence Day Pledge that India must sever her connection with Great Britain and said:

"But \at no time have we thought in terms of isolating ourselves ... from other countries or of being hostile to countries which have dominated over us. On the eve of this great occasion, when we stand on the threshold of freedom, we do not wish to carry a trail of hostility with us against any other country ...\" And \We want to be friendly with the British people and the British Commonwealth of Nations. (7)\"

On another occasion he explained that the contacts which had been developed between India and Britain during the past 150 years could not be cut off suddenly and the relationship between them would "remain, unless the break came in

---

(6) The Times of India (Bombay), 23 January 1947, 6.

such a way as to poison the future." Moreover, Pandit Nehru
was fully conscious of India's importance and perhaps he was
not unhopeful that Britain, which was opposed to the republican
concept in the case of Eire, would accept republican India
in the Commonwealth.

In the context of the world today India is in a
very strong position, politically and economically
(Nehru explained). Crudely speaking, India is in
a strong bargaining position. India is so geogra-
phically placed that little can happen in South-East
Asia without her concurrence.

He further said:

India will not approach any country as a supplicant
but as an equal. She will offer the hand of friend-
ship to Britain. If she takes the hand, well and
good. (9)

Not only the Congress leaders but some prominent British
leaders were also optimistic about India's connection with the
Commonwealth. Lord Mountbatten was so hopeful that he asked
the British Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee, in his 'Instrument of
Instructions' of March 1947 to define the objective of the
British Government as being to obtain a unitary Government for
India, "if possible within the British Commonwealth." (10)

(8) Address to the Associated Chambers of Commerce,
Calcutta, 16 December 1946. The Statesman (Calcutta), 17
December 1946, 1.

(9) Ibid.

(10) Alan Campbell-Johnson, Mission with Mountbatten
The sincerity of the Labour Government, its decision to transfer power peacefully to the Indian people at an early date and the subsequent appointment of Lord Mountbatten as the Viceroy of India created a favourable impression in the minds of the Congress leaders. The effect of Attlee's policy statement of 20 February 1947 was immediate and profound. Pandit Nehru welcomed it and observed that it removed "all misconception and suspicion." He expressed the hope for "the establishment of close and friendly relations with the British people for the mutual advantage of both countries and for the advancement of the cause of peace and freedom all over the world." The direction of Nehru's thought was made clearer on 24 March 1947, when in the course of his discussion with Mountbatten, he actually suggested "an Anglo-Indian union involving ... common citizenship - in effect, a far closer bond than Commonwealth status", which Nehru felt (12) was "psychologically and emotionally unacceptable." V.K. Krishna Menon supported Nehru's views with further explanation that Dominion Status was not acceptable to India because such were the suspicions about Winston Churchill that if he was prepared (13) to accept that status, it could not mean real freedom. In

(11) Cited in Ran, n. 4, Introduction, LXV.
(12) Campbell-Johnson, n. 10, 45.
(13) Ibid., 50.
April 1947, he informed Mountbatten that he and the Congress leaders were actively searching for a formula which would ensure a close link with Britain. He explained that initiative by Congress was not possible because it would lose them their position. It must come from the British. The request of the Indian leaders to Lord Mountbatten to continue as the Governor-General of Independent India, after 15 August 1947, was a further indication that they did not intend to make a complete break with the British Commonwealth.

By the time the power was actually transferred, Lord Mountbatten’s imaginative leadership, his sympathy for Indian freedom and his personal friendship with Nehru had improved Indo-British relations beyond all expectations. He and Lady Mountbatten had helped to bring about a remarkable psychological change in the attitude of the Indian leaders. They were successful in creating a big fund of goodwill for the British people in India. The Indo-British reconciliation, one of the greatest rapprochements of history, was a prominent feature of the first Independence Day Celebrations on 15 August 1947. Pandit Jawaharlal at the State banquet stressed the importance of the psychological and emotional factors in dealing with the people of India and feelingly observed that whatever shape the relations between Britain and India might take in the future, a new start had been made, and he hoped

(14) Ibid., 66.
and believed that "the friendship between them would (15) endure."

The evidence reviewed in the preceding paragraphs, including the remarkably changed psychological attitude of Congress leaders on the eve of Independence, reveals that the ultimate decision regarding membership of the Commonwealth still remained open. Dominion Status was certainly accepted only as a temporary measure. It would be replaced after the new Indian Constitution came into being. But there was sufficient evidence to suggest that Congress leaders were willing to keep India within the Commonwealth provided the Commonwealth was willing to accommodate Republican India within its fold. Thus the decision, in a way, was left to Britain and the Dominions; whether or not they were willing to take Republican India within the Commonwealth. So the main problem during the post-independence period up to April 1949 came to be not so much one of persuading the Congress leaders as of searching for a face-saving formula which would accommodate Republican India within the Commonwealth.

This argument can be carried a stage further. By their actual experience in working the Dominion Status the Congress leaders were further convinced of the advantages of the Commonwealth link. On 16 January 1948 Sardar K.U. Panikkar informed a member of the Governor-General's staff that Nehru

(15) Ibid., 162.
was now "more firmly" persuaded of the need for "Indo-
British understanding." In the following month Lord Mountbatten
informed his staff that "individual Indian leaders are alive
(16) to the advantages of the continued Commonwealth connection." The first clear indication of the favourable attitude of the
Indian leaders came through a footnote to the word 'Republic'
in the Draft Constitution of India published on 26 February
1948 that "The question of the relationship between this
Democratic Republic and the British Commonwealth of Nations
(17) remains to be decided subsequently." The attitude of the
Congress leaders was clarified further by Nehru in his speeches
(18) made from time to time. In April 1948, C. Rajagopalachari
(then Governor of West Bengal) in his letter to Sir Tej Bahadur
Sapru gave an indication that India's connection with the
British Commonwealth would continue. He asserted that the
republican form was "not inconsistent with Commonwealth
relations" and that the principle was "now fairly well recognised.

(16) Ibid., 269.
(17) Ibid., 291.
(18) India, Constituent Assembly, Drafting Committee,
Draft Constitution of India (New Delhi, 1948). The Draft
Constitution suggested that India should be called a Sovereign
Democratic Republic.
(19) See, for instance, speech in reply to debate on
Prof. N.G. Ranga's 'Cut Motion', 8 March 1948, Constituent
Assembly (Legislative) Debates, 3 (1948) 1771-72.
(20) C. Rajagopalachari to Sir T.B. Sapru, 22 April 1948,
Sapru Correspondence.
Lord Mountbatten was keenly interested in finding some way in which the republican status of India could be reconciled with Commonwealth membership. He wanted to see the issue finally decided before his departure from India. On 25 February 1948, the day before the Indian Draft Constitution was published, Mountbatten prepared an aide-memoire on India and the Commonwealth for the British Under-Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Mr. Patrick Gordon-Walker. In the aide-memoire he suggested certain changes in the structure of the Commonwealth, "particularly in nomenclature, to allow Asian countries to remain more easily associated with it." Although he was not happy with the word 'Republic', he remarked, "I think there can be no doubt that there is room for a Republic within the Commonwealth." He pointed out that the word 'Dominion' was not acceptable to India, after the Objectives Resolution in favour of a Republic. It had "a debased meaning" in India, "whether of domination or of status short of full freedom."

The turning-point came at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in October 1948, the first which Nehru attended. The issue was not formally discussed at the Conference, but Nehru and Attlee exchanged views and "found the formula satisfactory". Pandit Nehru, Attlee told Mr. Michael Brocher afterwards, "realized that membership in the

---

(21) Campbell-Johnson, n. 10, 290-1. The word 'Dominion' was now disliked even by Canada, the oldest member of the Commonwealth. See Patrick Gordon-Walker, The Commonwealth (London, 1962) 155.
Commonwealth meant independence plus, not independence minus. India was not committed in any sense, reported Nehru on his return from London, for the issue was to be decided by the Constituent Assembly. But through his public statements in London and recorded broadcast from the BBC on 26 October 1948 he indicated that in all probability India would continue her membership in the Commonwealth. "We obviously want a closer relationship with England", he said at the press conference. In the broadcast he was happy to note that the old colonial Empire of Britain had gradually changed into "a combination of free Commonwealth countries ... and ... non-self-governing countries" and expressed the hope that the change-over would be complete "soon" so that the Commonwealth of Nations would become "a real commonwealth of free nations". He was firmly convinced of the ideals of the Commonwealth - "the establishment of peace, the prevention of conflict and the establishment of human rights all over the world" - the ideals he wanted India to pursue. Further, he was surprised to find "a large measure of unanimity" at the Conference, "not only in the objectives to be aimed at, but


(23) The Indian Review (Madras), 49 (October 1948) 541.
also in the methods to be pursued. And in his private and personal talks during his stay in London, he was reported to have indicated his willingness to remain in the Commonwealth. No doubt there was "evidence of a more favourable attitude to Commonwealth membership" on the part of Nehru at the end of the Conference.

Having persuaded himself of the advantages and the virtues of the Commonwealth, Nehru found no difficulty in convincing the Congress and his Cabinet. His colleagues supported him in his endeavour to evolve a formula for continued association with the Commonwealth. They agreed that India should strive to maintain the Commonwealth connection for national and international reasons. The Congress endorsed Nehru's views at the Jaipur Session in December 1948. It was declared that the Congress would welcome India's "free association with the independent nations of the Commonwealth for their commonweal and the promotion of world peace", provided it did not come in the way of her "freedom of action and independence" and her Republican status was recognized.

(24) Jawaharlal Nehru, Independence and After: A Collection of the more important speeches, September 1946 - May 1948 (Delhi, 1949) 316-17.


(26) Hansergh, n. 1, 250.
within the Commonwealth.

The final arrangement for India's membership was concluded at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in April 1949, and was embodied in the Declaration of London. India's intention to become "a sovereign independent republic" and her desire to continue her "full membership of the Commonwealth of Nations" and accept "the King as the symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and as such the Head of the Commonwealth" was agreed to. And all the members of the Commonwealth were said to be "freely cooperating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress."

A vast majority of the Congress leaders welcomed the London decision and congratulated Nehru for the success. Mr. Rajagopalachari, Governor-General of India, stated that some link with Britain was thought necessary and the only alternatives were the Commonwealth membership and a treaty link. The latter being more binding while morally less valuable was discarded. The "flexible and nobler" link of the Commonwealth without any specific obligations and fully recognizing the sovereignty of India was therefore "the only solution consistent with a desire to co-operate in the task of conservation of world peace.

(27) Resolution, Indian National Congress, Resolutions on Foreign Policy, 1947-57 (New Delhi, AICC, n.d.) 4.

(28) Appendix IV.
and avoidance of war." He further said that India had worked "a historic revolution" for the whole of the Common-wealth and the decision was "a posthumous victory" for Gandhiji, "a moral gain" for Britain and India and "a big step forward" for civilization itself. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, President of the Congress, and many others strongly commended the decision.

Prominent Congress leaders being in favour of the decision there was no difficulty in getting it accepted by the Constituent Assembly which was dominated by the Congress. On 16 May 1949 a formal resolution was moved by Nehru in the Constituent Assembly which, after a long and spirited debate, gave its approval the next day. On 26 January 1950 India, by becoming a republic within the Commonwealth, established a precedent for its further development.

There is a widespread belief that the decision to remain in the Commonwealth was exclusively Nehru's, that it was he who persuaded the Congress and the Constituent Assembly to

(29) Address to the All India Newspaper Editors' Conference, Bangalore, 16 May 1949. The Hindu (Madras), 17 May 1949, 4.

(30) For the views of Sardar Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Dr. Sitaramayya, see ibid., 29 and 30 April and 3 May 1949 respectively.
accept it and that in accepting this advice they had merely acknowledged faith in Nehru's leadership. No doubt there is much truth in this belief. But this seems to be an exaggerated view. Nehru had been the chief spokesman of the Congress foreign policy, perhaps next only to Mahatma Gandhi, ever since the thirties, and since independence he was the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs. It was natural that the initiative should have been his. Being the official spokesman of India his share in the decision must have been far greater than that of other Congress leaders. But it cannot be said that India accepted the decision just because of Nehru. It was a joint decision of Nehru and his senior colleagues. Had there been strong opposition from any of his senior colleagues, such as Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, Dr. Rajendra Prasad or Rajagopalachari, Nehru might not have been successful in persuading the Congress and the Constituent Assembly to endorse his policy and India might have gone out of the Commonwealth. The fact is that the Congress was dominated by the Right wing. And this domination became stronger after the Socialists had left the Congress early in 1948. Leaders of the Right Wing like Sardar Patel and Dr. Rajendra Prasad had not been opposed to the Commonwealth connection, even in the thirties. It was Nehru himself who was regarded as one of the arch enemies of that connection. And so when he took the initiative in favour of continued membership of the Commonwealth the Right Wing gladly supported him.
Reasons for remaining in the Commonwealth

India's decision occasioned much surprise both at home and abroad. Many people asked, and still ask, why did Nehru and the Congress, which had been opposing any formal tie with the British Commonwealth, voluntarily decide to remain within it, specially when they knew that such a step would evoke not inconsiderable opposition at home—specially from the Communists and the Socialists—and criticism abroad from the Communist bloc? Why did Nehru's India change her mind? The question would seem to be based on an incomplete understanding of the basic stand of the Congress. The Congress was opposed to Dominion Status and India's connection with the imperialist Britain, but it had never been hostile to a free and equal partnership with a democratic Britain. The Congress leaders hoped that if India became free, British imperialism would not survive and that the character of the British Empire or Commonwealth would change. The Congress aimed at independence, but had never demanded a complete break-away from Britain. It was opposed to every kind of domination, formal or real, but it was not averse to co-operating with Britain on terms of equality and freedom. Its greatest leader, Mahatma Gandhi, wanted not to leave the British Commonwealth, but to convert it into a real Commonwealth of free nations for the benefit of mankind.
This point may be stated somewhat differently. From the Congress point of view it was not India which had changed; it was rather the Commonwealth that had changed. During the pre-independence days the British Commonwealth was, to Congress leaders, synonymous with British rule. But the complete transfer of power to India and subsequently to Burma and Ceylon made them feel that the old ideas of British domination were dead and the Commonwealth was 'now' a really free association of independent nations. Even the famous Balfour formula of 1926 was set aside and the old names and labels were changed to suit the new conditions. The expressions 'Dominions' as 'autonomous communities', 'British Commonwealth of Nations' and 'Crown' were replaced by the expressions 'independent member nations', 'Commonwealth of Nations' and 'King' respectively; the member nations remained no longer united by the 'common allegiance to the Crown'; they were 'freely co-operating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and (31) progress.'

(31) The Balfour Formula defined the status of Great Britain and the Dominions as follows:

'They are autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.'


Compare the above with the London Declaration of April 1949 given in Appendix IV.
This is not, however, the complete answer to the query. There were more positive reasons for India's decision. The Indian leaders could not have made the decision without weighing carefully the advantages and disadvantages of such membership and must have concluded that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. Many of the factors which had influenced their decision were explained by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in the Constituent Assembly on 16 and 17 May 1949.

From the national point of view, India's pro-eminent needs were security and economic progress and from the international point of view a measure of stability in ever-changing and uncertain world conditions.

Every realist recognized India's weakness in the matter of defence, particularly sea and air defence. Before 1947 Britain was responsible for the defence of India and naturally the organization of the Indian armed forces was on British lines and they were equipped with British-made weapons. India needed British help and co-operation for training, equipment and further development of her forces at least for some years. In the economic field the need of British connection was no less imperative. India was being faced by many economic difficulties. The bulk of her trade was with the Commonwealth countries; her exchange reserves were tied up in the sterling area. She needed foreign capital and capital goods from abroad to build up her economic strength.
The Commonwealth link, it was felt, would help her "speedy progress economically and otherwise." Obviously without that link, Nehru said, it would be "a far more difficult task" and it would take "a much longer time." He added, "we are likely to progress, to have more opportunities of progress, in this way than we would otherwise have in the next few years."  

Pandit Nehru thought the Commonwealth was "against war" and worked, on the whole, for "peace" and so it was in conformity with the underlying principles of India's foreign policy, in particular of removing discord and bringing about harmony among nations. "We join the Commonwealth", he said, "obviously because we think it is beneficial to us and to certain causes in the world that we wish to advance." In the world context, "it is something that encourages and helps peace ...." The Commonwealth membership would widen the stage

(32) Speech in reply to debate on India's decision to remain in the Commonwealth, 17 May 1949. Constituent Assembly Debates, 8 (1949) 68.

(33) Ibid., 69.


(35) Speech while moving that the decision to continue in the Commonwealth be ratified, 16 May 1949. Constituent Assembly Debates, 8 (1949) 7.

(36) Speech in reply to the debate, 17 May 1949. Ibid., 69.
on which India could play an important international role without committing herself to a bloc. It did not come in the way of India's co-operation and friendship with other countries. On the other hand, Nehru thought, "it is easier for us to develop closer relations with other countries while we are in the Commonwealth than it might have been otherwise." Moreover, India did not want to take the risk of becoming completely isolated by dissociating herself from the Commonwealth, specially in an era of cold war.

The interests of Indian settlers in various British colonies and the countries of the Commonwealth could be better served, it was believed, if India remained within the Commonwealth herself than if she went out. At least it would prevent their condition from becoming worse. India was connected with Britain by many historical and cultural ties and it was not in the best interests of India to break those ties suddenly. Moreover, membership of the Commonwealth was "an agreement by free will, to be terminated by free will" and it involved no "obligation in the nature of commitments." It did not violate previous pledges and India's freedom and independence was unimpaired. So it was "a profitable business."

---

(37) Speech while moving the resolution, 16 May 1949. Ibid., 9.

(38) Ibid., 3.
and at the same time "good on moral grounds," concluded Nehru.

Other considerations may also have influenced India's decision to some extent. The internal situation of India - the problem of Kashmir, the problem of re-establishing millions of refugees, the problem of food shortage and so on - the rapid spread of Communism in Asia (even in India, particularly in West Bengal, Madras and Hyderabad), and the events that had been happening in the neighbouring countries, specially China, Indonesia, Malaya and Burma, were all influential factors. The belief that Pakistan would continue to be a member of the Commonwealth and that in such circumstances India's dissociation from the Commonwealth was likely to affect prejudicially her defence position and her relations with countries of the Western bloc, might have given, perhaps, further support to Nehru's arguments. Nehru's friendship with Labour Party leaders and the Mountbattens and the goodwill created by the Labour Government by withdrawing from India in a peaceful and friendly way were factors of not inconsiderable importance.

---
(39) Speech in reply to the debate, 17 May 1949. Ibid., 69.

(40) Many scholars have written on the reasons for India remaining in the Commonwealth. See: Raj, n. 4; K.N. Panikkar, Common Sense about India (London, 1960); and Gurcharan Nihal Singh, "India and the Commonwealth", Aspects of India's Foreign Relations (New Delhi, Indian Council of World Affairs, 1949). (Mimeographed)
The decision was accepted ungrudgingly by the Congress and there was hardly any opposition to it. It was accepted not so much for sentimental reasons, but rather for the tangible advantages believed to accrue from Commonwealth membership, both in the national and international fields. It is scarcely surprising, however, that there was not much display of enthusiasm for the decision among the rank and file of Congressmen who, unlike their leaders, were not well aware of the advantages which practical experience had revealed to their leaders.

NEHRU'S DEFENCE OF THE COMMONWEALTH LINK, 1950-57

During the post-republic era, there was hardly any change in the attitude of the Congress which under the great leadership of Pandit Nehru continued to be the ruling party throughout this period. Whenever there was any opposition to the Commonwealth link, from any quarter, Nehru invariably supported the link. He remained, and still is, the greatest champion of this cause. In support of the Commonwealth connection, he reiterated almost the same arguments as he had put before the country in 1949. The experience gained in the national and international fields further convinced Nehru and his colleagues of the value and advantages of the membership of the Commonwealth. And in the Congress circle there seemed to be a better appreciation of the connection than in 1949.
India's membership of the Commonwealth was so taken for granted that it was not raised at the Nasik Congress in September 1950. The only query about Nehru's foreign policy was the feeling the Congress President, Mr. Purushottam Das Tandon, expressed that "it is now time to get nearer the Western democracies". On 21 May 1962, Pandit Nehru, speaking in the debate in the Council of States on the President's Address, justified India's association with the Commonwealth and said, the association did not in any way curtail the freedom of India in pursuing an independent policy. As to the criticism that because Indians domiciled in South Africa and other places in the British Empire and the Commonwealth were not treated well India should leave the Commonwealth, he said, the question had "nothing to do" with India's membership of the Commonwealth. "Our being out of it will not help a solution of that problem; it will probably hinder it to some extent." He further pointed out that "many good things" and "many helpful things" had flowed from "our membership of the Commonwealth". Even in regard to the larger question of world peace, India's association with the Commonwealth had been "very helpful", and "we have exercised such influences

---

(41) The Manchester Guardian, 28 September 1950. Taken from press clippings which don't give page number.

(42) Parliamentary Debates (Council of States), 1 (1952) col. 294.
as we have in a more widespread way, in a somewhat more effective way than we might have otherwise done. On another occasion replying to the Communists' criticism that India had been inclining more and more towards the Anglo-American bloc in her economic policy, Nehru said, India could not live in isolation; she had to get essential goods from abroad. Though she would be perfectly prepared to deal with Russia and other countries, her economic, trade and commercial connections were with the Commonwealth and Western countries and it was "very difficult for us to build new channels overnight." So it was "simpler" and "easier for us" to get things from Western countries for the moment, he said.

Nehru strongly refuted on many occasions the persistent criticism from the opposition, specially the Communists, that India being in the Commonwealth was not completely free and the Commonwealth connection was of no advantage to her. In reply to one such criticism in the Lok Sabha (House of the people), on 8 April 1965, Nehru stated that the Commonwealth connection had put no limitation on India's freedom. On the other hand, "our being in the Commonwealth, in a sense, gives us a larger freedom in international activity than otherwise to a certain extent, and we have utilized that

(43) Ibid., col. 295.

freedom and we propose to utilise it." It had been to India's advantage both in "the international sphere" and in regard to certain other "matters of developmental activities, training, etc.," which she could get "more easily in that way." It was "very helpful to us," he said, to deal with the questions of Indians living in the British colonies for they were spared the trouble of choosing prematurely their citizenship, Indian or of the country they lived in. So, "it is a very good bargain, a very good arrangement for us and for other countries," he concluded. Similar views he had expressed on an earlier occasion:

I think we have gained positively by being in the Commonwealth. Definitely so. During the past five years (since 1948) specially, many avenues have opened out to us which may not have been open if we had not been there .... Secondly, I think that we have somewhat affected world policies, not only directly in so far as we can, but to some extent indirectly also, through the Commonwealth, and I think that that is to our and the world's advantage.

Moreover, there was no obligation in the Commonwealth, he added, except "the obligation of occasional friendly approach and friendly talks."

(45) The Hindu, 9 April 1953, 5.

During the subsequent years Pandit Nehru continued to reiterate that the Commonwealth membership not only had not violated India’s independence but, on the other hand, it had definitely been helpful to India, to Indians domiciled in British colonies, to Britain too, and to the larger cause of world peace and co-operation. On 30 September 1954, Nehru informed the Indian Parliament that even many non-British and non-Indian people had confessed that India was "very wise" in remaining in the Commonwealth, because it had helped in "international affairs" and also in the "work for world peace."

Nehru favoured the Commonwealth connection, also because he was hopeful that in the course of a few years British colonies like Gold Coast, Nigeria, Malaya and Singapore would join the Commonwealth as free and independent nations and thereby would change its European character. That would provide India, he believed, the field for "the widest sphere of influence and co-operation." And, therefore, "from those wider points of view, it is desirable for us,"

---


(48) Perhaps Nehru was referring to his talks with the Chinese Premier, Chou En-Lai who visited India in June 1954. The remark was made after his Nehru's reference to India's friendly relations with the Republic of China. The Hindu, 2 October 1954, 10.
"he said" ... to have this Commonwealth link and association and thereby help in the larger cause of peace. India wanted to encourage the tendency that more and more British colonies should attain independence and join the Commonwealth. "May be that our presence there in the Commonwealth does encourage it, the various developments in Africa," he said.

In July 1966, on the occasion of receiving the honour of the Freedom of the City of London at Guildhall, Pandit Nehru stated that Indo-British relationship could play "a great and vital part and serve well our two peoples, Commonwealth and mankind as a whole." It was India's "profound desire and hope," he added, that relations between India and the Commonwealth "will grow more and more and that we shall lend strength to each other in fellowship and for service to other peoples in the world."

Pandit Nehru seemed to have attached considerable importance to the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences as a factor for India's association with the Commonwealth.

---


(51) The Hindu, 6 July 1966, 6.
In a statement on the Commonwealth Conferences (June-July 1956) in the Lok Sabha, Nohru praised the role played by these Conferences.

These conferences are forums for exchange and understanding, whether it be of agreement or differences. They enrich the experience of the participants and serve to inform them of both similarities and divergences of views, but they do not seek to condition, much less formulate, national decisions.

As to their significance, he said:

... these Commonwealth Conferences with their diverse composition and the divergences of outlooks and backgrounds and yet displaying a capacity for tolerance and for reaching common understandings, are a good thing for the world, beset as it is by the sectional outlook and much intolerance - ideological, racial and other. (52)

The greatest crisis, however, came over the Anglo-French aggression on Suez in November 1956. A tremendous outcry for severance of the Commonwealth link followed even amongst normally pro-Commonwealth groups. The demand for severance of the Commonwealth connection was led by the Communists inside the Parliament and by Rajagopalachari, in the country at large. After the British Government's refusal at first to comply with the UN General Assembly recommendation to cease-fire in the Suez area, Rajagopalachari

(52) Statement on Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference and his visit abroad, 31 July 1956. Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.6, Pt. 2 (1956) cols. 1557 and 1559-59 respectively.
urged that India should sever her Commonwealth ties. In a public statement he said:

We are in the Commonwealth to stabilize an area of peace, and seeking to vidica it progressively in the world. An association based on that principle loses its justification when the principal partner in that association so obstinately persists in aggression and flouts a resolution of the General Assembly of the U.N. passed with such unanimity and earnestness of purpose. (53)

In the subsequent speeches he pleaded that India should at least "suspend" her connection with the Commonwealth (54) until "this wrong was righted." These candid expressions of the great statesman, who has been one of the known supporters of the Commonwealth idea, clearly indicated the shifts in public opinion.

In the AICC meeting at Calcutta, Dr. Alagral Shastri demanded the severance on the ground that it would be "a warning to all aggressors" and that by remaining in the Commonwealth "the great man who gave the world Panch Shila" (i.e. Nehru) was "in danger of being tarnished" along with the British Government. The AICC refused to concede the demand. Dr. B.C. Roy, S.K. Patil, Seth Govind Das, H.V. Gadgil and others urged that the severance would not help in "the easing of tension", on the other hand, it would only result in "confusion" and that nothing should be done in

(53) The Hindu, 5 November 1956, 6.
(54) Ibid., 7 November 1956, 6.
"anger". Besides, the people of Britain were not behind their Government's action in Egypt. Therefore, it was not "necessary" for India to register its disapproval of British aggression by withdrawing from the Commonwealth. They thought such a situation had not arisen "yet". Pandit Nehru stated that he would not like India to break off from the Commonwealth "unless circumstances compel us to do so", implying that the circumstances were not, then, so compelling. He did not, however, exclude the possibility of a breach if the circumstances so demanded.

Later in the Indian Parliament - Lok Sabha (20 November 1955) and Rajya Sabha (7 December 1955) - Pandit Nehru, while firmly rejecting the demand of the Opposition for terminating the Commonwealth bond, pointed out that the only purpose India's withdrawal from the Commonwealth could serve was to record India's irritation over Britain's action in Egypt and this could be done equally by India remaining in the Commonwealth itself. If India should leave the Commonwealth because a leading member of the association had behaved in an objectionable manner, she should logically also quit the United Nations since three of its principal members - Britain,


France, and the Soviet Union (in Hungary) had behaved in an equally objectionable manner. He said it had been the privilege and policy of India to "be a bridge between countries and not to break bridges that already exist. There is enough breakage in the world for us not to add to it." He further said that the Commonwealth was a bulwark of peace independent of individual member of the association and he believed that it was good for India, and good for Britain too, to maintain the connection.

The Suez crisis and the public debate which followed it engendered in India a new awareness of the nature and limitations of the Commonwealth. The Nehru Government's strong condemnation of the Anglo-French aggression and at the same time its refusal to terminate the Commonwealth connection demonstrated that India's connection with the Commonwealth was based not merely on political expediency and sentiments, but on the conviction that the association was a bulwark of international peace and security and was good not only for India, Britain and the Commonwealth but mankind as a whole.

Again, early in 1957, the attitude of some of the Commonwealth countries towards India vis-a-vis Pakistan in

(57) Speech in Rajya Sabha on resolution re. India's membership of the Commonwealth, 7 December 1963. The Hindu, 8 December 1965, 7c.
regard to Kashmir, specially as expressed in the UN Security Council, intensified further Indian feeling against Britain and the Commonwealth. The Indian people regarded this attitude as certainly not impartial or neutral. It was attributed to the British Government's desire for revenge for India's attitude during the Suez crisis. The resentment was so great that even Pandit Nehru in the Lok Sabha confessed that "for the first time" he felt that India's association with the Commonwealth might "some time or other require further consideration." He was, however, still convinced that India should continue the connection. He reiterated his old arguments and said that the association being "not positively harmful to us" it was better to keep it. Moreover, the inner composition and content of the Commonwealth was undergoing a change. Ghana had become a member of the Commonwealth and possibly Malaya and Nigeria would follow suit.

(53) A resolution freezing the Kashmir Constituent Assembly's decision and reiterating the principle of plebiscite under UN auspices was submitted to the Security Council on 25 January 1967 by Australia, Colombia, Cuba, the United Kingdom, and the USA. The resolution was passed the next day. On 14 February they (excluding Colombia) submitted another resolution for the use of a temporary UN force and for Swedish Representative Mr. Jarring to consult India and Pakistan Governments. It was, however, vetoed by the Soviet Union. A new resolution, which made no reference to a plebiscite or a UN force, was then introduced by Australia, the UK and the USA. The new resolution was adopted on 21 February 1967 by 10 votes to nil, the Soviet Union abstaining.
Therefore, despite the painful shocks which India had experienced recently specially over Kashmir, Nehru said, it was "desirable" to remain in the Commonwealth "in the present context."

Mr. Rajagopalachari wanted India to quit the Commonwealth on the issue of stoppage of the British nuclear tests. He said: "To break away over Kashmir would have been selfish and wrong. Equally, to remain in the Commonwealth now would be to share the guilt of a crime whose magnitude can only be guessed." Pandit Nehru remained firm and refused to succumb from the Commonwealth.

Thus, despite the strains and stresses on many issues such as Goa, Kashmir, Suez, racial discrimination, SEATO, Baghdad Pact, and British nuclear tests, India's bond with the Commonwealth had survived and Nehru and the Congress were still convinced of its merits.

One may find inconsistency between Nehru's policy of non-alignment and his championing the defence of the Commonwealth link. It does look so superficially. But the Commonwealth being a loose and voluntary association involving no commitment, each member is quite at liberty to follow an

---


(60) *Hindustan Standard* (New Delhi), 27 April 1957.
independent policy of its own. The case of Biro is an example. In the Second World War she remained a neutral while the rest of the Commonwealth was at war. This proves that the membership of the Commonwealth and the pursuit of non-alignment policy are not mutually exclusive. If it was true in the war period, it is all the more true in the new post-war concept of the Commonwealth.

OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES

Almost all other parties demanded severance from the Commonwealth connection. The main arguments raised by the critics of India's continued membership of the Commonwealth were that it violated previous pledges; permitted British domination and allowed no real freedom; was undesirable and immoral because of racial discrimination, specially in South Africa; was against India's policy of neutrality and committed her to the West; and was undignified, India being a big and not a daughter nation.

The Congress Socialist Party while accepting the Dominion Status in 1947 as "a stop-gap arrangement of a defined duration", stated that under no circumstances "must we allow our eyes to falter away from independence." The

(61) Resolution on 3rd June Plan, National Executive, New Delhi, 10 June 1947. The Indian Annual Register, 1947, I, 265.
Congress Socialists having lost all hopes of giving a leftist turn to the economic and social policies of the Congress Government, after dropping the prefix 'Congress' from the Party's name, seceded from the Congress early in 1948, and thereafter began to function as a separate independent Socialist Party. The Socialists suspected that the Congress leaders would like to continue the Commonwealth connection and that secret negotiations were going on in this connection. They demanded that the Indian constitution must positively declare that "India's membership of the British Commonwealth shall terminate at the commencement of the new constitution."

Then the participation of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in October 1948 and the Jaipur Congress resolution in December 1948 confirmed their belief that the Congress was preparing to link India with the Commonwealth, the National Executive of the Party categorically declared that the Socialist Party "cannot be a party to India remaining a part of the British Commonwealth." The reasons for opposing the connection, the National Executive explained, were that the policy of racial discrimination and economic exploitation was being followed

(62) Socialist Party, Draft Constitution of Indian Republic (Bombay, 1948) II.
in the British Commonwealth; that Britain and her friends in the Western bloc were pursuing an imperialist policy in Asia and Africa and they wanted to retain "a strategic foothold in Asia"; and that it would "inevitably" tie Indian foreign policy to "the apron strings" of Britain. It further urged that if India was to be saved from participation in another war, she (India) should not only keep clear of any Power-Bloc but take the necessary steps for "the creation of a Third Force with a view to prevention of another world war and in particular to organize an alliance of Asian countries in furtherance of this object." And in the opinion of the Socialist Party that could be done only if India did not become a part of the British Commonwealth. Moreover, the National Executive said, the oft-repeated pledge of Independence might be "violated.

Subsequently, in March 1949, the Socialist Conference at Patna stated that "Even complete independence of the country is threatened by the possibility of her continuance in the Commonwealth." Besides reiterating the views expressed by the National Executive in December 1948 the Conference

---


pointed out further that in view of the fact that Britain by committing herself to the North Atlantic Pact had definitely joined the American power bloc against Soviet Russia, India's neutrality would become "a farce" if she (India) were to retain her tie with the British Commonwealth which was itself tied up to the Atlantic Pact. The new situation in Asia caused by the collapse of the Kuomintang demanded that India should stand "completely free from any alliance with Britain." "India cannot unite the countries of Asia in a powerful peace bloc," the Conference said, while these nations are struggling against European domination, and while she remains tied up to the British Commonwealth." The Socialist Party reiterated its appeal to the Indian people to fulfil the solemn pledge of Independence and assert India's "fullest sovereignty by terminating her link with the British Commonwealth," implying that complete sovereignty was not compatible with Commonwealth membership. The Socialist Party, however, was willing to have a friendly treaty with Britain for mutual benefit.

On the announcement of the London decision (April 1949) Mr. Jai Prakash Narayan, General Secretary of the Socialist Party, declared that his Party would take "the first opportunity, whenever it is in a position to do so,

---

(65) Resolution on Commonwealth Relations. Ibid., 124-5.
to undo this great national blunder." He thought the
agreement was "a triumph for British diplomacy" and not for
Nehru. India's association with the Commonwealth, he said,
would prevent India from "gaining self-confidence and
(66) standing on her own feet." Acharya Narendra Deva, President
of the Party, said: "British diplomats will now start the
game of entangling us more and more in European politics." India's membership, he added, would have "an adverse effect
(67) on our relationship with South-East Asia." The Socialists
Party unequivocally declared that India's membership of the
Commonwealth even in its new form was "inconsistent with the
basic policy of active neutrality." It had meant "in
practice passivo lining up" of India with Anglo-America
on every vital issue and "robbed our country of independent
(68) initiative in the matter of foreign policy."

Almost on the same grounds the Socialists continued
to oppose India's connection with the Commonwealth during
the post-republic period. On the eve of the inauguration of
the Indian Republic, Jai Prakash Narayan said: "The Republic

(66) The Hindô, 1 May 1949, 4.
(67) The Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 20 May 1949.
(68) Socialists Party, Policy Statement (Bombay, 1947,
2nd edition reprint, 1951) 57. The policy statement was
adopted in August 1947 and revised in October 1949 by the
General Council of the Party."
of India will not be real, till the link with the Commonwealth is severed." Again, after the inauguration, "... we are a republic more in name than in reality." Asoka Mehta explained that the Socialists wanted to break the Commonwealth link and to form and lead a "third camp", based on close economic union between the countries of South-East Asia which, they envisaged, would be "a step towards world government." The demand for breaking the bond was included in the party programme in the first general elections. The programme stated that the nationalist aspirations of the Indian people had not been "fully realised" and that racial inequality was being tolerated in the Commonwealth. "The Socialist Party therefore favours the withdrawal of India from the Commonwealth. That alone can complete our quest for freedom."

Soon after the elections the Socialist Party and the Kisan Hazdoor Praja Party, which was founded under the leadership of Acharya J.B. Kripalani in June 1951, merged.


(70) The Times of India, 1 February 1960, 11.


together and became known as the Praja Socialist Party.

The attitude of the PSP towards India's membership of the Commonwealth did not differ from that of the Socialist Party. The Praja Socialists always aided with the Communists in the Indian Parliament in demanding severance from the Commonwealth. They could not see any advantage for India in remaining within the Commonwealth and they refused to believe that India could follow an independent policy of neutrality while she remained linked up with the Commonwealth. Speaking in foreign affairs debate in the Indian Parliament on 16 March 1953, Mrs. Sucheta Kripalani said: "Our economic, commercial, financial - even military - policies are tagged on to the United Kingdom. Our freedom of action is fettered to a great extent." Commonwealth membership "makes us suspect in the eyes of others," she added.

In the post-1953 period the PSP continued to emphasize active and positive neutrality and the formation of the 'Third Force' for peace. That was not possible, it believed, so long as India remained a part of the Commonwealth. The party's policy statement adopted by the Party Conference in December 1956 clearly stated:

(74) For the formation of the Party, see PSP, Herzog: How and Why? (Bombay, 1952).

(75) Parliamentary Debates (House of the People), Vol.2, Pt:2 (1953) cols. 2119 and 2120 respectively. She had expressed similar views in the House of the People on 12 June 1952.
India's policy of peace demands that she should come out of the British Commonwealth which still maintains colonial domination and racial discrimination and which strategically, economically and politically is a part of the American bloc. (76)

The attitude of some of the Commonwealth countries, specially Britain, to the Goa and Kashmir questions provided further ground to the Indian critics for demanding sevorence from the Commonwealth. The discussion of the Kashmir question by the SEATO Council at Karachi in the early March 1956 was greatly resented by the Indian people. Acharya Kripalani strongly urged the Indian Government to make it clear that "if England and other Commonwealth countries persist in showing such scant regard for our vital interests and side with our opponents, our membership of the Commonwealth cannot continue." The Anglo-French aggression against Egypt in November 1956 was made an important ground for India to quit the Commonwealth by the opposition parties. The PSP reiterated its demand that "India should sever connection with the Commonwealth" both outside and inside the Indian Parliament.


Mr. Jai Prakash Narayan, however, was reported to have hold the view that India should not leave the Commonwealth (79) on the Suez issue. And curiously enough, the Praja Socialist Party's 1957 election manifesto did not demand the termination of the Commonwealth connection. On the other hand, the Socialist Party (founded by Dr. Rammachar Lohia after breaking off from the PSP in December 1965) always kept in the forefront of its international aims "India's dissociation (80) from the British Commonwealth."

The Communist Party of India, founded in the first half of the nineteen twenties, was an illegal body till 1942. The Indian Communists had, however, been working from within the Congress. In the 1942 August Quit India movement they betrayed the Congress and supported the Government in the war effort which after the Russian entry was acclaimed as a 'people's war'. In 1945 when the Congress leaders were released, they branded the Communists as traitors and sought

(79) Citied by Dr. Lamba Sundaram in his speech in Debato on international situation, 20 November 1965. See Lok Sabha Debates, Vol.9, Pt. 2 (1965) col. 643.

(80) For the manifesto, see S.L. Poopal, ed., National Politics and 1957 Elections in India (Delhi, 1957) 82-91.

to expel them from the Congress. Before they were expelled, however, they resigned.

For some time there was confusion in the Communist Party and it could not frame a definite policy towards the Congress Government. In June 1947 it stated that the Mountbatten Plan provided "new opportunities for national advance" and did not condemn the Congress acceptance of it as betrayal and treachery.

In early 1948, the Party Congress at Calcutta adopted a political thesis expressing the Party's views on national and international questions. The thesis vehemently criticized the Mountbatten Plan, Nehru's foreign policy and the Commonwealth connection. In accepting the Mountbatten Plan, the national leadership, it said, had "betrayed" the freedom struggle and had struck "a treacherous deal" with British imperialism. The Plan had given the Indian people "not real but fake independence." "Britain's domination has not ended, but the form of domination has changed." The supreme organs of the State - the Armed Forces and the bureaucracy - and the


(83) Resolution on 3rd June Plan, Central Committee of the CPI, 20 June 1947. The Indian Annual Register, 1947, I, 269.
national economy were controlled by "the servitors of imperialism." The CPI, unlike the Socialist Party, expressed its opposition to India pursuing a policy of neutrality. The policy of Nehru of forming a "so-called third bloc," it said, had kept India "away from the democratic [Soviet] camp and opened the way to the imperialist [Anglo-American] camp," and that "there can be no neutrality in the world struggle between the forces of imperialism and the forces of democracy, independence and socialism ...." The CPI wanted India to join hands with the Soviet bloc, and advocated "complete severance from the British Empire and full and real independence" and "confiscation ... and nationalisation" of foreign capital in India. The London Agreement was condemned as a "great betrayal" by a pro-Communist paper.

In subsequent years the CPI continued to advocate breaking the Commonwealth connection and almost invariably advanced the arguments of the Calcutta thesis. The 1952 election manifesto and the 1961 programme refuted the Congress claim that freedom had been won and said that the Indian

(85) Ibid., 46 and 115 respectively.
(86) Ibid., 84 and 86 respectively.
(87) Cross Roads (Bombay), 1 (6 May 1949) 3.
Government was tied to "the chariot-wheels of British capital" and essentially carrying out "the foreign policy of British imperialism." The Indian Government being tied to imperialists could not "pursue an independent and progressive foreign policy, a genuine policy of peace." The demand for the withdrawal of India from the Commonwealth, for the confiscation and nationalization of all British capital and for the removal of the British advisers in India was reiterated. The third Congress of the CPI at Madurai at the close of 1963 appreciated India's foreign policy in regard to certain issues such as the Korean War and the proposed United States Military Pact with Pakistan and welcomed "the growing bond of friendship" between the people of India on the one hand and the USSR and Chinese Peoples' Republic on the other.

But as yet, the CPI was not convinced of the independence of India's foreign policy and thought it was "subject essentially to the influence of British imperialism." It believed that the question of India's struggle for peace was

(88) CPI, Programme adopted by the All-India Party Conference, October 1961 (Bombay, 1961) 6 and 8 respectively.
(89) CPI, Election Manifesto (Calcutta, August 1961) 11.
(91) Ibid., 7.
closely linked with the question of India's struggle for "full and unfettered national freedom", and said:

A fully independent and powerful India ... outside the Commonwealth and outside all imperial influence, will be a great factor for world peace and the freedom of all Asian and colonial peoples. Hence the necessity to intensify the fight against British imperialism, for quitting the Commonwealth and for the confiscation of British capital... (92)

In fact since the very independence of India "quit Commonwealth" had been the watchword of the Communist Party. Almost in every foreign affairs debate in the Indian Parliament the Communist group persistently urged severance of the Commonwealth connection. The main argument, both inside and outside the Parliament, was that it was essentially inconsistent with India's full economic and political freedom and that it linked India with the Western bloc. But in addition to this, there were several other grounds - grounds mostly in common with the Socialists, the Praja Socialists and other critics - for opposing the connection: Racial discrimination, economic exploitation, British colonial policy, SEATO, Baghdad Pact and the attitude of some of the Commonwealth countries to the Kashmir and Goa questions were stated at one time or other as important reasons for quitting the Commonwealth.

In regard to all these issues mentioned above the Indian Government was equally opposed to the policies of Britain and other Commonwealth countries concerned. In the

(92) Ibid., 8.
post-1953 period it not only strongly opposed the US-
Pakistan Military Pact, the SEATO and the Baghdad Pact, but
Pandit Nehru with Chou En-Lai enunciated the principles of
Panch Shila. India played an important role in Indo-China's
peace negotiations and the Bandung Conference. The period
1954-56 saw India strengthening her hands of friendship and
co-operation with the USSR and China. Chou En-Lai, N.A.
Bulganin and N.S. Khrushchev visited India and Nehru visited
China and Soviet Russia. The Chinese and the Soviet leaders
praised India's foreign policy and efforts for peace.

Naturally, this had a moderating effect on the attitude
of the CPI. So much so that in April 1956 the Central Committee
in its report to the Party Congress at Palghat praised India's
great role in the battle for peace and "the growing sweep of
the struggle for defence and strengthening of national freedom." (93)
The report stated that India was till recently a part of the
colonial and semi-colonial world, but since the Dadarul
Congress (December 1953) the foreign policy of the Indian
Government had steadily undergone a radical change.

Earlier, despite its demarcation from and
opposition to the imperialists on several issues, it was essentially a policy influenced by British
imperialism. Today, despite the vacillations and
inconsistencies that still persist to some
extent, it is essentially an independent policy.
A policy of peace. (94)

---

(93) CPI, Indian Communist Party Documents, 1950-1966

(94) Ibid., 233.
The report, however, added that the struggle was not yet over. It continued and would have to be continued with still greater vigour than before, as long as "India's present economic and political relationship with the British imperialists, the suppressor of colonial peoples, the partner of America in the aggressive military alliances ... remains...."

Subsequently, Indian Government's strong condemnation of the British aggression on Suez left no ground to the Communists and other Indian critics for pleading that India's foreign policy was not an independent one. The Communists now urged that India should quit the Commonwealth, not because it threatened India's independence and initiative, but because India's membership of the Commonwealth "gives the British the prestige which enables it to deceive the world public opinion." It was argued that Britain used the Commonwealth "as a sort of moral cover for their unholy actions" and she wanted to uphold such an association with a view to "bluffing ... \[and\]

\[97\] deceiving the people." Moreover, it was "inconsistent with

\[(95)\] _Ibid._, 235.


\[(97)\] Speech of Bhupesh Gupta, Deputy Leader of the Communist Group, in debate on international situation, 3 December 1966, _Parliamentary Debates (Raiya Sabha)_., 15 (1963) col. 1355.
the principles of Panch Shila."

The Communist Party's 1957 election manifesto stated, *inter alia,* that the Commonwealth membership was inconsistent with India's policy of peace, anti-colonialism and opposition to military blocs; and violated national dignity. The manifesto declared that the CPI "will intensify the struggle for severance of India's relation with the British Commonwealth." Again, early in 1957, the Communist leaders pleaded for the severance as "a retaliatory measure for Britain's deliberate hostile acts" in the Kashmir issue in the UN Security Council.

Not long after the attainment of independence, the Hindu Mahasabha received a great setback on the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi (30 January 1948). Mahasabhaites in large numbers including V.D. Savarkar were arrested as suspects and tried in courts. The Mahasabha suspended its political activities to be resumed in August 1948, after the acquittal of Savarkar and release of many other leaders. In the following December it received another setback when Dr. Syama Prasad Hookerjee and many others resigned from it.

---


(99) *Poplai*, n. 80, 110.

because they thought that in Independent India there was no scope for a communal body. Its influence was considerably reduced and after the first general election 1952, it no longer remained a party of much significance.

The Hindu Mahasabha was opposed to India's association with the Commonwealth. On the London Agreement it expressed its apprehension that the entry of India into the Commonwealth was "extremely likely to impose obligations on her, detrimental to her peace and progress." Both the Anglo-American and the Soviet blocs, it believed, were formed in order to dominate and exploit the less developed nations. Therefore, it said, the Indian leadership had committed "a grave error in joining the Commonwealth ... and thereby in joining the Anglo-American bloc." The Mahasabha leaders believed that the Commonwealth was nothing but "a euphemism for Empire" and the Congress' claim that India had become a full-fledged Republic was "false." And the Mahasabha's 1952 election manifesto proposed "to come out of the Commonwealth in order to make Bharat

---


"India a really free nation."

The argument that the Commonwealth connection was inconsistent with India's real freedom was not, however, pressed in subsequent years. It was opposed more on grounds of racial discrimination and Britain's attitude to the Kashmir and Goa issues. On the Suez issue (1956) the Mahasabha pressed, perhaps not very strongly, for severance of the Commonwealth connection. Mr. N.C. Chatterjee, President of the Mahasabha, while condemning the British action in Suez and the Russian action in Hungary said, "we have got to seriously think as to whether India should continue to be a member of this Commonwealth, unless the democratic forces in Britain assert themselves over the die-hard Tory forces" implying that with the success of democratic forces in Britain, he was willing to remain in the Commonwealth. Mr. V.G. Doiphonde urged that India "should seriously consider whether it should continue in the Commonwealth of Nations or not." The demand to sever India's "incongruous connection

(104) Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, Election Manifesto (New Delhi, 1951) 10.

(105) All India Hindu Mahasabha, Presidential Address by N.C. Chatterjee, 32nd Session, Jodhpur, November 1955 (New Delhi, 1956) 2.

with the Commonwealth was reiterated in the 1957 election manifesto on the ground that India had gained very little from it.

Having resigned from the Nehru Cabinet in April 1950, as a protest against the Nehru-Liaquat Pact which, he thought, was not in the interests of the Hindus of East Bengal, Dr. S.P. Hookerjee organized a new party, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (Indian People's Party) in October 1951. The Jana Sangh was opposed, but unlike the CPI and Socialist Party not vehemently, to the Commonwealth connection mainly on account of the attitude of Britain and some other Commonwealth countries in the Kashmir issue. The Party advocated a policy of "enlightened national self-interest." Dr. Hookerjee at the Opening Convention of the Party stated that India's continuance in the Commonwealth had to "be re-examined with great care."

We frankly recognized [he said] that we have gained very little by continuing to function within the Commonwealth. On the other hand in our dealings with Pakistan we have been struck by a strange policy of partiality towards that country observed by Great Britain. (109)


(108) Balraj Madhok, Political Trends in India (Delhi, 1959) 54. Mr. Madhok is one of the founders of the Jana Sangh.

The party would insist on India getting out of the Commonwealth, he added, if Britain and other Commonwealth countries followed the present policy of always supporting Pakistan and opposing India in the United Nations and elsewhere.

These views were reiterated in the election manifesto adopted by the Opening Convention and on many other occasions in subsequent years. On 12 June 1952 in the Indian Parliament, Dr. S.P. Hookerjee referred to the attitude, in general, of the Commonwealth countries towards India in the United Nations and said: "... we should come out of the Commonwealth at this stage ... [for] it has not helped us at all. On every crucial occasion the Commonwealth countries have failed to stand by India where India's stand has been right and just."

In the post-1953 period, however, the Jana Sangh seemed to be perhaps less occupied with the Commonwealth. On the Suez issue Dr. U.N. Trivedi, an important leader of the party in the Indian Parliament, opposed the demand for quitting the Commonwealth. He pleaded that Britain being a friend of India,

(110) See All India Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Manifesto (Delhi, 1951) 8.

India, instead of leaving her, should advise and correct her. And it was not impossible that Britain would feel "the strength of our argument and retrocede [hor] steps." The Suez issue, he said, "cannot be a ground for our getting (112) out of the Commonwealth." The Jana Sangh in its 1967 election manifesto made no demand for India's withdrawal from the Commonwealth. The issue was not even mentioned.

From the above survey it is clear that, in the first decade after independence, Indian political parties were divided in their attitude towards India's membership in the Commonwealth. The Congress leaders, despite the Objectives Resolution passed earlier by the Constituent Assembly, were not averse to India's continued association with the Commonwealth. They, however, wanted the proposed republican status of India accepted by the British Commonwealth. After the arrival of Lord Mountbatten, as the new Viceroy, efforts to find a suitable formula for accommodating the Republic of India within the Commonwealth were seriously made by both sides, India and Britain. Those efforts successfully culminated in the historic London Agreement of April 1949; and the Republic of India became a full member of the Commonwealth.


(113) See Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Election Manifesto 1957 (Delhi, n.d.).
The decision of the Indian leaders was influenced by many factors. Important among them were the past association, the economic and strategic interests, the community of political faith, the belief of playing a wider and greater international role, the fear of isolation, the new concept of the Commonwealth and the sympathetic and friendly attitude of the Labour Government and the Mountbattens. In the post-republic period Pandit Nehru actively and the ruling Congress Party passively continued to defend the Commonwealth link more or less on these very grounds. Pandit Nehru remained so convinced of the values of the Commonwealth connection that even strains created by such issues as Kashmir, Goa, SEATO, Baghdad Pact and Suez could not move him from his position.

Almost all other parties were against India's Commonwealth connection. The main arguments against the connection were that it violated previous pledges; was inconsistent with full economic and political freedom; immoral because of racial discrimination; and was against the policy of neutrality and peace. By 1954, however, the foreign policy of Pandit Nehru removed to a great extent the misconception that India had not attained real and complete freedom. But the PSP refused to believe that India was following a policy of active and positive neutrality and continued to urge that India should form a third bloc for peace. The CPI wanted India to join
hands with the Soviet bloc. And all these parties - PSP, CPI, Jana Sangh and Hindu Mahasabha - wanted Britain's neutrality, if not help, in the Kashmir and Goa issues. Gradually the opposition became less vehement. What opposition was left was based on sentiment except perhaps in the case of the Communists who were opposed on ideological grounds. In the second general election, 1957, only the CPI reiterated the demand for India's withdrawal from the Commonwealth. The PSP and the Jana Sangh, the other two major opposition parties, did not demand it. The Hindu Mahasabha was no longer a force in Indian politics.