

Sanjay

BLITZ

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No Right or Left, I believe in...

NEW DELHI: Since the foreign press had lately enthroned him "the Crown Prince" and "the likely heir to a political dynasty" (TIME: Feb. 2, 1976), I put this fable of a dynastic succession directly to Sanjay Gandhi. His answer was as clear as it was characteristic:

"IN A DEMOCRACY SUCH THINGS DON'T ARISE."

On the other major "Right-Left" controversy over which "differences" had reportedly arisen between the Prime Minister and her son, also, Sanjay came out with a brief but crushing rejoinder:

"I BELIEVE IN ANYTHING THAT WILL HELP THE POOR. JUST USING WORDS SUCH AS RIGHT AND LEFT HAS NO MEANING. THIS IS A POINT ON WHICH THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE OF OPINION BETWEEN MY MOTHER AND ME."

Sturdy, rational commonsense

In contrast with the Niagara of nonsense that fall from the lips of our politicians, Sanjay Gandhi is a young man of few, very few words. To him, WORDS spell WORKS, ACTION, PERFORMANCE. Language is a bond of commitment; therefore, he deliberately maintains a low profile in his talks as well as speeches. Promises and programmes, in his view, must be matched by performance.

This invests everything he says or does with a sturdy, rational commonsense, uninhibited by ideology, and consequently likely to be misunderstood by political ideologues.

Hence the Left-Right, Socialism-Capitalism controversy, Sanjay has no time for the confounding confusions and contradictions of the warring ideologies that have tied up performance in a Gordian knot. Like Alexander, he would cut the knot with the sword should the need arise.

Plan for Youth Action

What impressed me most during the two sessions I had with him was his down-to-grassroots realism. Take, for example, his plan of action for the Youth Congress. It is an eminently practical programme of involvement in the reconstruction of the poorer and weaker sections of society, a project to set up block level officers all over the country in order to involve young doctors, lawyers, teachers, etcetera, in the service of the ignorant and illiterate peasantry.

This is a genuinely Gandhian programme in its simplicity and directness: "To teach at least one person a year to read and write; to plant and look after one tree every year; to fight against dowry; to promote family planning."

ANYTHING THAT WILL HELP POOR

- SANJAY GANDHI tells BLITZ in this exclusive interview with R. K. KARANJIA

According to Sanjay, "at present there is a wave of enthusiasm... The (20-Point) Programme is going faster than any programme ever announced before. Unfortunately, a large part of the implementation has to be done by the bureaucracy who do not have a stake in it... The Youth Congress can help by acting as THE EYES AND EARS OF THE GOVERNMENT by checking the work done and reporting on it."

True to Gandhi's "Talisman"

An important point made by him in regard to the "Garibi Hatao" programme is that it should be so implemented that "the person involved can feel the results."

The Youth Congress has already set up a model of this kind of achievement in the Capital where the juggiwallas have now become masters of their own property with each person earning a minimum Rs. 175 per month. In this enterprise, at least, the rehabilitated slum-dwellers "can feel the results"; and Sanjay

Gandhi and his Youth Congress are mighty proud of their first major enterprise.

We of BLITZ had been seeking to resurrect over the years Gandhiji's famed "Talisman" to his followers to think and work in terms of "the poorest of the poor and the weakest of the weak". This talisman today motivates Sanjay Gandhi's thoughts as well as actions.

For swadeshi solutions

It is this Gandhian faith, in the final analysis, that makes him reject foreign ideologies for swadeshi solutions arising from India's own ethos, culture and civilisation. True to the Mahatma's evangel, he believes in everything swadeshi. This faith led him to produce India's first wholly swadeshi car, in design no less than the machine, without copying foreign models like Fiat or Morris. It again persuaded him to sacrifice Western-style clothes in favour of the Indian kurta-pyjama.

That does not mean, however, that the designer of the Maruti automobile cherishes

Sanjay Gandhi answers all your questions

Continued from the Front Page

pseudo-mahatmic ideas. Sanjay Gandhi is about as suspicious of godmen, transcendental meditators and the like as he is of the Marxist radicals.

His socialist conscience

Why? — I asked; and the answer demonstrated a genuine socialist conscience: "Have you noticed that the godmen are always surrounded by wealth and power?" — he queried, to add "if a poor man seeks their darshan, he will have to wait a whole week, while the wealthy chaps get immediate audience."

This sentiment for, and commitment to, the poor and the weak is the bedrock upon which Sanjay Gandhi wants to reconstruct the Youth Congress, his first political charge, and, later, hopefully, also the Ruling Party. The interview that follows make this fact quite clear.

For a common membership

Q: To the best of my recollection, you have not yet joined the Congress. Do you propose to do so? Can one be a functionary of the Youth Congress without becoming a primary member of the Congress?

A: I have become a member of the Youth Congress. The National Students' Union of India, the Youth Congress and the National Congress are parts of the same organisation, but for some reasons all three have a different membership. It might save some paper work if they had a common membership: that

is, a Congress member who is a student and below 25 could automatically be a member of the NSUI, and those below 35 members of the IYC, without any separate membership.

Tasks for Youth Congress

Q: Now that you have been elected to the National Council of the Youth Congress and are actively involved in its day-to-day activities, could you briefly outline what you want the Youth Congress to be and what programmes are intended to be carried out by this reorganised body?

A: A large number of our young people want to do something for the country but don't know what to do. At present there is a wave of enthusiasm. The Youth Congress can help formulate plans to put these young people to work. The tasks should be easy, not very time consuming, and such that the person involved can feel the results.

BROADLY the programme put forward is:

- (i) TO set up block level offices all over the country;
- (ii) TO give free service of writing out applications and letters for illiterate people;
- (iii) TO involve young doctors to go out and give free medical advice and teach people about hygiene and diet;
- (iv) TO involve young lawyers to give free legal advice—that is, not necessarily to appear in Court, but to stop a poor man spending money on a hopeless case;
- (v) TO teach at least one



SANJAY GANDHI
Commitment to the poor

person a year to read and write; (vi) TO plant and look after one tree every year; (vii) TO fight against dowry, and (viii) TO promote family planning.

Check & report crimes

Q: Cannot the Youth Congress workers directly intervene in the marketplace to check hoarding, black-marketing, price-rigging and other anti-social practices. In Iran, for example, the young party cadres have been armed with statutory powers to execute the Shahanshah's anti-inflation crusade. Why can't the Youth Congress be similarly used?

A: The Youth Congress workers should check things like hoardings, black-marketing, etc. but their activity should be limited to CHECKING and REPORTING. ACTION should be taken by the police, otherwise corruption might creep into the Youth Congress.

Land Army at State level

Q: What about the Youth Land Army project we have been discussing? Can't unemployed young men and women be drafted in shock-brigades of a vast Land Army, and put to work on project sites in the form of a volunteer labour force? There are great tasks of national reconstruction lost in governmental files like, for example, Visvesvaraya's gigantic national river grid plan or Dinshaw Dastoor's more recent garland canal project, awaiting a Land Army. What prevents us from harnessing unemployed youth to such great national tasks?

A: This is a very good idea, not only to get work done but also to get a more disciplined youth force. It could and should be taken up at State level; in fact, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana are already considering this. Unfortunately, to take up a project like this on a national scale and to make it compulsory would be very expensive, even if we only give three meals a day instead of pay. We may not be able to afford it.

Holding vs hoarding

Q: Of course, the financing of such gigantic projects requires funds, and the national budget is tight. In this

matter, I believe, your "food-for-work" programme offers the precise solution necessary. Only the other day, the Union Food Minister, Jagjivan Ram, said in Madras that the farmers are holding 25 to 30 million tonnes of foodstocks. If these can be procured from the hoarders instead of the measly four million tonnes presently taken, you could feed not only a million-strong Land Army, but also the semi-starving section of our population. Why can't we resort to such drastic remedies necessitated by the Emergency?

A: The holding of grain by farmers is not the same as hoarding by traders. A farmer normally stocks his year's requirements at one go. Because of this it would not be possible to deprive him of his stock.

Power & irrigation: high priority

Q: We have some 140 million hectares of cultivable land of which only 10 per cent is used for more than one crop. Besides, there are 40 to 50 million hectares of cultivable wasteland. Can't the Youth Congress take over the task of investigating our land potential for cultivation and handing over the cultivable potential to our 37 to 40 million landless farmers.

A: The main reason for harvesting one crop is lack of irrigation. The Youth Congress cannot irrigate this land, but we should give high priority to power and irrigation in our planning. This year, that fortunately is being done.

Way to develop sports talent

Q: You said recently at a public meeting that we should spot Sports talent, also, for those youths who are not well placed to go to school or college. How do you propose to do this difficult job?

A: Children who are good at sports at the primary school level should be given scholarships to institutions where their talent can develop. Haryana already has one such institute.

Eyes & ears of Govt

Q: To my mind, the discovery of youth potential becomes possible when we progressively reduce poverty. In this context, the implementation of the 20-Point Programme announced by your mother, which is a time-bound programme, the time being one year, is crucial. Our reports are that the pace of implementation is below expectation. What have you to say to this default? In what way can the Youth Congress help in this priority task?

A: Everything becomes easier with the removal of poverty. THE PROGRAMME IS GOING FASTER THAN ANY PROGRAMME EVER ANNOUNCED BEFORE. Unfortunately a large part of the implementation has to be done by bureaucrats who do not have a stake in it. Even so a number of States are going on schedule with the

THE YOUTH CONGRESS CAN HELP BY ACTING AS THE EYES AND EARS OF THE GOVERNMENT, BY CHECKING THE WORK DONE AND REPORTING ON IT.

Rehabilitation of juggiwallas

Q: During our personal talks, you came out with several refreshingly original ideas about solving the unemployment problem. If I remember aright you claimed that you would rid the Capital of its excess of servants by finding them more suitable and dignified employment elsewhere within five years. We would like to know more about this project.

A: With the resettlement of "jhuggis" in Delhi, we found that the people complaining most were not the "jhuggi" dwellers who, in place of an illegal shack, have now become masters of their own property. The complaints come from those who had lost servants due to the shifting. Everyone shifted was offered a job with the Delhi Development Authorities at higher wage and with shorter working hours than a servant has. The number of servants in some parts of Delhi has in fact already come down.

No Left or Right: Help the poor

Q: There were all sorts of canards, especially in the Western press, that you used to clash with your mother on many issues. You have nailed these lies, so have we of BLITZ. At the same time, you have gone on record that you could have differences with your mother on certain issues (BLITZ: August 30 1975). Now that the Prime Minister has reiterated at Chandigarh her conviction that in a country like India socialism, of course, harnessed to the native genius, alone can take the nation forward. On the other hand, you have been saying that you do not believe in the Right-Left controversy. Could you please clarify?

A: I BELIEVE IN ANYTHING THAT WILL HELP THE POOR. JUST USING WORDS SUCH AS LEFT AND RIGHT HAS NO MEANING. THIS IS A POINT ON WHICH THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE OF OPINION BETWEEN MY MOTHER AND I.

Q: Invited Nixon to Peking? True, Son. To offer him the Premiership addy? I don't know, Son.

Q: And Daddy? Go on, Son. A shortage of whisky is caused by British Scotch-makers... By the 1980's, Son. But a flood of it is assured Indian Scotch-fakers addy? I don't know, Son!

Tax!

Il Sathus, and Quacks the squeeze Income-Tax!