

'Mrs. Gandhi Will Have To Answer To Many Things'

Transindia: Mr. Chandra Shekhar, do you think you have one of the most thankless jobs in the country today, what with having to build up a party composed of such varied components as the Janata is?

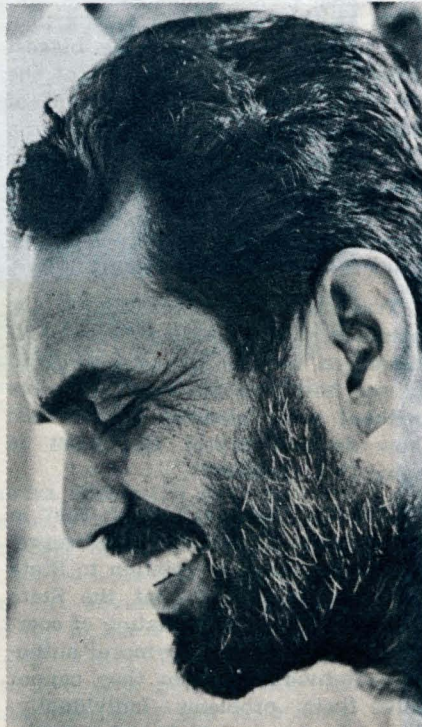
Chandra Shekhar: I agree that we have had to create a party from scratch. But I would not say that my job is thankless. There are certain advantages which one cannot ignore, and there are many difficulties, too. But we have functioned over the last five months with admirable style, I think, because this was the first time in independent India that a party was swept into power without a formal party organization to back it.

Transindia: We were talking to Mr. Brahmananda Reddy the other day, and he seems to expect an early comeback for the Congress Party. Would you comment on that?

Chandra Shekhar: I cannot question or judge Mr. Reddy's optimism. If he wants to remain in politics, he has to have that kind of optimism! But I think he will not be so optimistic after some time, because the Janata Party, as I told you, has, in the last four or five months, surmounted its initial problems, and after a month or so, Mr. Reddy will not be able to accuse us of having no definite programs. Anyway, with any program put out by any political party, it is not the document that counts, but it is the actual implementation of the program that counts. At every Cabinet meeting, outsiders are also invited to present their opinions. The three-day meeting of the Janata Working Committee this week will also formulate certain economic and other policies.

Transindia: There has been an unusual delay in resolving the differences that exist between the factions within the Janata Party. Specifically, there has been a lot of talk about the struggle for dominance between the BLD and the Jana Sangh groups.

Chandra Shekhar: The whole question is that, unfortunately, all the parties comprising the Janata



ONE BELCHHI WILL NOT DECIDE THE COURSE OF INDIAN HISTORY

Party today have fought each other for political power in the past. But take the case of the Congress Party itself. When the Congress Party was in power, when the question of allocation of tickets came, or the question of formation of ministries came, there were various groups that pushed their claims forward, and there was always some sort of strain or stress or the other. So, in comparison with that, I don't think the Janata Party's problems are more difficult or more complicated! In spite of there being four or five parties in our ranks, we have been able to select candidates for parliamentary and state assembly elections, and we have also been able to form ministries in the States where we came into power. Such problems are bound to come up, but I don't think they are so acute that one should really bother about them. So I don't think there are any problems that are insurmountable.

When the Assembly elections came around, there was some criticism and some grumbling about the allocation of tickets. But the Party candidates contested the elections just like a team.

Transindia: Let's take that argument a little further. Any great political party in the world, if we examine it closely, is a coalition of sorts, composed of various groups. In the case of the Janata Party, it is commonly understood that it is the Jana Sangh that is the dominant faction, due to its superior strength prior to the March elections. People feel that it will dominate your Party, and that its past ideology cannot be that easily forgotten.

Chandra Shekhar: You see, it is not possible for me to comment on the past ideology of the Jana Sangh or the BLD, or the Socialists or the Congress (O). Because at one stage or the other, I opposed all those ideologies, and I don't agree with those ideologies. But the very formation of the Janata Party was a clear indication that everybody tried to remodel his thinking according to the changed situation. And today we are not talking in terms of the Jana Sangh or of the BLD or of the Socialists or of the Congress (O) but in terms of the Janata Party. I feel, personally, that anybody who talks in terms of past associations will have to face a difficult time, because it is not easy for any of the constituents of the Janata Party to quit the Party! If they try to get out of the Janata Party then they will have to decide to get out of Indian politics, because the public opinion is so tremendous that nobody will be allowed to live according to his past associations, and on the lines of his work in the past. And the formation of the Janata Party, and the trust that the people have shown in the Janata Party, is enough guarantee that these factions will have to change their attitudes according to the present situation.

Transindia: Every party does represent some economic interests. No party can represent all interests at any given time, especially in a developing economy like ours, where priorities have to be made, and one has to reward some and punish some. Now, who are the people who are going to be rewarded by your Party in the near future?

Chandra Shekhar: Our options are very limited in this country. You must always remember that we belong to a country in which more than 50% of the people live below

the poverty line. Simultaneously, we have adult franchise and a parliamentary democracy. No political party can survive in this country, whatever its ideological considerations, without catering to the needs of the people, who are below the poverty line. If these sections are not satisfied, if their aspirations are not fulfilled, it will not be possible for democratic structures to survive, and it will not be possible for a party representing only a small section of the people to survive. So the point is quite clear; that if the Janata Party wants to survive, as a major political force in this country, it will have to lean toward the

poorer sections of the people. We don't want to punish anybody; we want to have conciliation in all sections of our society, because parliamentary democracy, to be frank with you, has certain limitations. So we would like to have the cooperation of all sections of society. But if the choice comes, if a small section wants to pressurize the government and the Party to move in a particular direction, the Party will have no option but to pressurize them in turn, so that they behave in a proper manner. Because the biggest questions is not the survival of the Janata Party, but the survival of democratic polity in this country. So I don't think there is any other option for any political party in this country but to adopt policies which benefit the people who were so far being exploited.

Transindia: Notwithstanding the homilies your Party has been delivering on the rise in prices, we fail to see how you can regulate prices without some element of coercion; how do you expect Gandhism to solve this problem?

Chandra Shekhar: I think that in many cases, Gandhism is misrepresented by people in relation to State behavior. It is true that the State is nothing but a combination of coercive powers, backed by moral authority. Individuals, when they cannot solve their problems individually, surrender some of their rights to the State, so that it may solve their problems collectively. But it does not necessarily mean that the State should be always ready to use coercive power. There are other means available in a civilized society, like the power of persuasion. So we have been trying to persuade people who are privileged, who dominate the economic structure today, to change their stances. But suppose these appeals fail; suppose they don't respond; then the State power, as it is constituted, cannot sit idle, cannot be a passive spectator. So in such extreme cases, coercive powers will have to be used. We may not like that option; we may not try to go all along that line. But suppose everything fails, then we will have to use some coercion. The Janata Party does not want to adopt oppressive measures, but it cannot, at the same time, be a passive spectator to the disintegration of society as such, to the failure of the parliamentary system as such. Because you know, most of the Janata Party leaders were in prison during the

Emergency. What for? Only because of their faith in democracy! So we are not going to stake the democratic system that has successfully operated in this country for thirty years, and people have renewed their faith in it only five months back. Nobody in the world thought Mrs. Gandhi would be overthrown so peacefully by the people of India, just before the Elections! So the Janata Party and government is not going to be so absurd as to throw into the dustbin the trust and the cooperation it won from the people in March.

Transindia: Mr. Chandra Shekhar, many people are viewing with concern the manner in which your Party is looking on while Mrs. Gandhi is trying to make a comeback. How exactly does your Party view her moves?

Chandra Shekhar: Last week, I was asked a similar question in Patna! I said that we have been fighting for the freedom of the individual in entering into politics and in indulging in political activity, within the framework of the Constitution. So when you talk of Mrs. Gandhi's "comeback", I don't know whether she ever really "retired" from politics! It was not we who forced Mrs. Gandhi to go out, it was the people of this country who forced her into oblivion! If Mrs. Gandhi thinks she can win back the support of the people by just pointing out the mistakes and the weaknesses of the Janata Party, let her try. She has every right to!

Transindia: Her recent visit to Belchhi, for instance, has focused attention on the atrocities being committed on Harijans...

Chandra Shekhar: Belchhi is good for propaganda! But Belchhi is not enough to help Mrs. Gandhi to stage a comeback! Because it is not one Belchhi, but hundreds of thousands of Belchhis, which pushed her out of power! And I think the Janata Party has learnt enough from Mrs. Gandhi's experience, and that it will not repeat the blunders she made. But if people support Mrs. Gandhi, I shall welcome it. But let us see what happens in the near future! The mere wishes of Mrs. Gandhi cannot do away with the Janata Party! The Janata Party is a hard reality today. It is dominating the country today; it is dominating the minds of the people today. And unless and until Mrs. Gandhi is able to win back the minds of the people, and she cannot do it by merely going to Belchhi, or pointing out the

CHANDRA SHEKHAR ON THE LINE



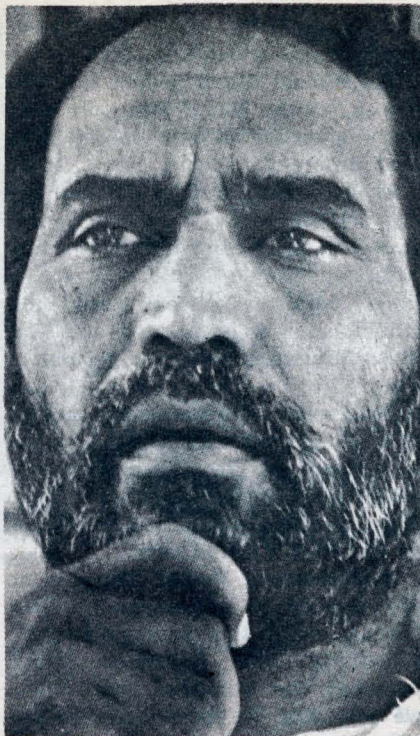
SUNDER SHANKAR

weaknesses of the Janata Party, why should we be agitated about her statements? She will have to answer to so many things! This morning you must have read in the papers about the arrests of her former aides. These things also will be judged by the people! So it is not one Belchhi which will decide the course of Indian history, but many other factors. And I am confident that the Janata Party will prove equal to the challenges facing it. Some unfortunate incidents do happen, and such incidents should not be repeated. We shall take steps to see that they are not. To inflate such incidents out of proportion is not the surest way to stage a comeback in Indian politics, and in a situation where one can hope to recapture the stage.

Transindia: Ved Mehta said recently in an interview that among all the Indian politicians he had met, he thought you were the most likely to be a future Prime Minister. Would you comment on that?

Chandra Shekhar: You know, I have great regard for Mr. Mehta, but his statement might only create problems for me, because it might create consternation among people who have aspirations to becoming the Prime Minister! I assure you that I have no such aspirations, nor can I claim such a position! But I assure you that there is no immediate move on my part to win that high position!

Transindia: Mr. Chandra Shekhar, could you give us your personal vision of how you would go about reordering the priorities that exist today so that those sections of the Indian population who live below the poverty line may also get a slice of the pie?



'I HAVE NO AMBITIONS OF BECOMING THE PRIME MINISTER!'

Chandra Shekhar: I have said this before too, when Mrs. Gandhi was in power, that the first thing we will have to learn is that people who are in an advantageous position, should try to learn that they belong to a poor country. They should learn how to live in a poor country. So the first priority is that all ostentatious living should go. It is not merely a question of saving money; it is a question of creating a proper psychological atmosphere. After all, how else can wealth be produced, except by utilizing our resources of power, by utilizing our human re-

sources? India may have scarce financial resources, but we do have enough human power. We have to enthuse people to work hard. We cannot enthuse them to work hard unless and until we reduce the presence of relative poverty. Absolute poverty may take some time to be removed, but relative poverty can be removed immediately by one stroke of a pen. So I would like that people who are in the higher strata of our society should learn how to live like citizens of a poor country. A country like India cannot afford to expend all her resources in manufacturing luxury goods. Our resources should be diverted to production of consumer goods which will satisfy the basic needs of our people. Then, the mind should be given work, whether it is economic or uneconomic. Nobody should be allowed to be idle. We have resources—we have enough stockpiles of food-grains, we have enough reserves of foreign exchange. We should have mind management. We can put our people to work in the countryside—they can build hundreds of roads, bunds, canals, work for which we require nothing but manpower, and the ability to feed the workers. So there are many fields in which we can provide employment to our people. But nothing is possible unless and until we create an atmosphere in the country in which, if wealth is produced, it will not go to a few people, but it will be distributed among the people, and priority will have to be given to people who are living below the poverty line. If Gandhism is relevant today, it is most relevant in the field of austerity. □

CONGRESS PARTY PRESIDENT BRAHMANANDA REDDY

'We Will Return To Power Soon'

Transindia: Mr. Reddy, many people feel that the Congress Party has had a great past, but does not have a great future. Would you like to comment on that?

Brahmananda Reddy: That the Congress Party had a great and glorious past is accepted by everybody. In spite of the setback in March and June, I should reasonably think that this organization, which is not a mere party but a

national movement, has strong roots everywhere, and its network is so great that it embraces the entire rural India, and urban India. Our fundamental policies, like democracy, secularism, socialism, and non-alignment, have not been rejected by the people. In fact, though there was some misuse and abuse of power at certain levels, the people were led to think that some dictatorial trends had come into play, and it was said

that there was an unnecessary projection of a certain young man. Still, you know, such things cannot have a lasting impression. So long as our basic policies are accepted, so long as our programs are accepted, so long as there is the inherent faith of the people in the Congress, we feel that provided we go about the job properly, provided we bring in democratic functioning at all levels, and give up this personality cult, certainly the Congress has a great future.

The last elections were not normal elections in the sense that people did not exercise their minds; they reacted to certain things. People ask me why we are on the defensive. We are not on the defensive. You see, the Emergency has brought in its train certain abnormalities. The fact



that the reason for promulgating the Emergency has never been agreed upon by everybody has not helped. Some people who are in power today say that Mrs. Gandhi did it for personal reasons. Some Congressmen say that the situation created by the then Opposition parties led to lawlessness and disorder, and that elected representatives could not be forced to resign. But because in the execution of programs several things went wrong in the later months of the Emergency, and because the media, they say, was controlled, all sorts of rumors circulated which tarnished our image.

Transindia: Mr. Reddy, we have heard several Congressmen saying similar things. Why was there no move to bring to the attention of the people concerned the excesses that were taking place?

Brahmananda Reddy: Many things which might have been done by a small clique or caucus, call it what you like, could not have been done by everybody, you see. But such of those excesses which had come to our notice, we had pointed out to the concerned people, the concerned agencies, the Chief Ministers of those States. And they would normally answer by saying that nothing was happening! I have personally pointed out several instances in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and several other places. But then, you see, it is difficult for anybody sitting here in Delhi to control whatever happens through-

out the country. Law and order, moreover, is a state subject.

Transindia: Many people feel that if you, as the Home Minister, were more assertive, things might have been different.

Brahmananda Reddy: Go and see my records—how many letters I wrote, to Chief Ministers, how many letters the Home Secretary wrote to Chief Ministers! How many individual cases were pointed out! The State Ministries began to get out of hand!

Transindia: More than five months after the March elections, there are no signs of the emergence of a particular side in the Congress Party. There is a pro-Mrs. Gandhi side, and an anti-Mrs. Gandhi side.

Brahmananda Reddy: There is no pro-anybody or anti-anybody! Just because, under this 'personality cult', something had happened which damaged the Congress very much, we felt, and we have assessed the situation, that democratic functioning must take place at all levels. Such of those institutions which exist within our Party, should discuss threadbare our policies, and come to a collective decision.

Transindia: But the manner in which things have been moving in the last few days indicates that the trend is toward a return to the old days, to dominance by Mrs. Gandhi.

Brahmananda Reddy: There is no question of domination by anybody. It is what we want to prevent! There

should not be domination by any one individual. It's a question of collective functioning, in a democratic way. What we are against is not personal personality, but the personality cult! We are reorganizing our Pradesh Congress Committees, and our District Congress Committees. We want them to be creative bodies. We want them to be lively institutions. We want them to involve as many people as possible.

Transindia: But isn't too much time being spent in deciding the issue of leadership of the Congress, collective or whatever?

Brahmananda Reddy: What decision are you talking of? You are again confusing the issue! What I am saying is, I should not be the only man to dictate policy, to dictate programs. On the other hand, I am one among many. Maybe I'm the President, but I should not control everything.

Transindia: So in effect you are implying that there is no conflict within the Congress Party?

Brahmananda Reddy: No, there is no conflict! So far as the Congress is concerned, it is a question of reviving the old method of functioning. It is a question of reviving the old values. It is a question of reviving the confidence and the credibility of the people in our organization.

Transindia: Are you suggesting that the Congress should return to its state thirty years back?

Brahmananda Reddy: I mean

THERE IS NO FIGHT FOR LEADERSHIP': BRAHMANANDA REDDY TALKING TO ANAND MOHAN (LEFT) AND CHAITANYA KALBAG





'WHY SHOULD THE CONGRESS PARTY MOVE FIRST?'

'going back' so far as values are concerned. We had certain moral values, we had certain ethical values, we had democratic functioning, people had great confidence and faith in us; all that must be brought back! It doesn't mean that I want the Congress of 92 years back!

Transindia: But if there has been a breach of the trust that people reposed in the Congress for thirty years since Independence, do you think that that trust can be restored at all?

Brahmananda Reddy: We are regaining it quickly, if I may say so.

Transindia: Many people feel that there is no possibility of the Congress returning to power for a long time to come. Would you comment on that?

Brahmananda Reddy: I think we should be able to come back within the next few years. I think the Congress will return to power within a few years.

Transindia: Many Congressmen have defected and joined the Janata Party, haven't they?

Brahmananda Reddy: Not many, not many! If you had seen the defections that had taken place in 1971 and 1972 from other parties to the Congress Party, if you had seen how many people from other parties had joined the Congress Party then, this is just a fraction.

Transindia: Many prominent Congressmen like Tarun Kanti Ghosh, who was Home Minister of West Bengal during the Emergency, have gone over to the Janata Party...

Brahmananda Reddy: I don't want to comment on that case. If you

switch your tape-recorder off, then I will!

Transindia: How do you rate the Congress Party's performance after the Lok Sabha elections?

Brahmananda Reddy: We have done well, very well. You see, we were in power for thirty years, and now we are a constructive opposition. We are sure we will enhance our stature by functioning as an enlightened opposition. And the people are not very happy with the Janata government, either. They have made too many promises!

Transindia: But wasn't that what the Congress Party did, too?

Brahmananda Reddy: What do you mean?

Transindia: We are talking of successive election manifestos of your Party which promised many things but delivered very few of them.

Brahmananda Reddy: I am not saying that we implemented 100% of what we promised. But generally, what we promised, we did. Maybe sometimes we made some excessive promises. But our Party is known for its sincerity, though in some cases we have no doubt failed to implement fully our promises.

Transindia: It was amazing with what ease so many of the senior Congressmen were silenced when the Emergency was clamped down. Now, such attitudes change slowly, and people still believe that it would be easy to impose one dominant train of thought on the majority of Congress members.

Brahmananda Reddy: So long as we have the interests of our Party,

and the interests of the country, at heart, we should be able to prevent such dominance in future.

Transindia: Your Party has reportedly not cooperated fully with the Government in helping repeal the 42nd Amendment. Why has this happened, although both sides now agree that there are many obnoxious portions in the Amendment?

Brahmananda Reddy: Why should the Congress Party move first? Our Party in Parliament has told them (the government) that they should tell us what they want to do. If they don't tell us what they want to do, and if they say we are not cooperating, what nonsense is this? The 42nd Amendment, which has been passed by us, we say we think again, we say we keep an open mind, and we say you please propose what changes you want! And you don't do it, and you say we are not cooperating! merely saying that the 42nd Amendment—What is this? What's the use of ment should go? Come on, what is wrong with the 42nd Amendment, how many articles of it are wrong, where it should be corrected, where it should be amended—come, let us discuss! They wanted to reduce the term of the legislatures and of parliament to 5 years again. Now why should it be 5 years? Why can't it be 4 years? Or 3 years? Or 6 years? What is their clinching argument to say it should be 5 years? What is the sanctity of 5 years? Therefore, it is a question of the ball being in the Government's court! What to amend, what not to amend, they do not know. And they say we are not cooperating? Does our cooperation mean that we agree to whatever the Government does? Is that the way Parliament functions?

Transindia: What does your party think of the Janata government's performance so far?

Brahmananda Reddy: We say they have not made up their minds yet on many issues. We want them to make up their minds, to be clear about their economic policies and their social policies.

Transindia: Will your Party cooperate with the government in scrapping the provisions relating to promulgation of Emergency in the Constitution?

Brahmananda Reddy: Certainly we do not want to have a situation in future in which democracy can be throttled, we do not want the people's voice to be stifled. □

