

The Indian Republic

Under the new constitution which comes into force to-day, India is a sovereign democratic republic. MR. RAJAGOPALACHARI, who has won general respect for the competence he has shown in the historic office of Governor-General of India, received a cordial personal message from the KING before performing his final official act by reading the proclamation which formally inaugurates the new polity. Had his age not deterred him from undertaking further responsibility, MR. RAJAGOPALACHARI might have been acclaimed by his countrymen as their first President, as well as their last Governor-General; but he refused to allow his name to go forward and the choice fell on DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD, elder statesman, three times President of the National Congress, chairman of the Constituent Assembly, and life-long follower of MR. GANDHI. His candidature was supported by MR. NEHRU and SARDAR PATEL; he was elected unanimously by the Constituent Assembly on Tuesday.

During the past three years almost every clause and article in the new constitution has been redrafted, revised, scrutinized, and amended to make sure that it meets Indian needs. The work was finished last November, but formal inauguration was deferred until January 26, which in recent years has been celebrated by the Indian National Congress as "Independence Day," a recognized occasion for speeches, processions, and demonstrations in support of Indian aspirations to national sovereignty. Now "Independence Day" will become "Republic Day." The new constitution, indeed, has many features which will be a lasting memorial to the good sense of the republic's founders and to the life work of MR. GANDHI. The feature that calls for special note on a day which has enlarged the concept of the Commonwealth of Nations by introducing its first republican member is the reliance of the new polity on the principles of the British Parliamentary system.

This reliance cannot be explained merely by the desire of the framers of the constitution to ensure the continuity of the Parliamentary tradition in which many of them were reared. It proceeded from more deliberate choice, made after careful study of constitutional experience and practice in many countries. By this choice, and by founding their new polity so largely on successive enactments framed in Westminster for the governance of India during British rule, the Indian people have affirmed the decision to apply to the management of their affairs that belief in the value of free discussion which is the essential feature of the governmental systems of the sister nations of the Commonwealth. There could be no better evidence that the desire of India to remain within the Commonwealth and to join its other members in cooperating to promote "peace, liberty, and progress" is not based simply upon a nice balance of self-interest which may shift with an alteration in the equilibrium of world-forces, but upon a certain identity of outlook on principles of political organization. It was this that largely accounted for the success of the conference which in April, 1949, found a way of reconciling India's decision to become a republic with her desire to remain a full member of the Commonwealth.

Experience has shown that the complete sovereign independence now enjoyed by the members of the Commonwealth has strengthened their sense of interdependence. Full freedom in the management of their affairs, far from weakening the impulse to cooperate with one another, has brought with it a keener sense of the benefits of cooperation. The unity of the Commonwealth no longer depends solely on the acceptance by every member of the KING as constitutional Head of its executive, legislature and judiciary. The monarchy has come to occupy a separate and representative position relative to the Commonwealth as a whole, standing as symbol and Head of the free association of independent member States. The acceptance by India of the representative function of the KING means that the Commonwealth organism has now no rigid pattern in the constitutional forms adopted by its members. As India and her Asian neighbours, Pakistan and Ceylon, come to exercise increasing influence in the counsels of the Commonwealth, they