

Third National Convention Mumbai, March 11 and 12, 2006

A REPORT

This Convention was convened under Article 9(d) of the ILG's Constitution.

Attendance

The following delegates attended (in alphabetical order):

Andhra Pradesh

1. Dr. Y. Sivaji (Guntur)
2. Mr. C. Narendra (Guntur)
3. Dr. L. S. N. Prasad (Guntur)
4. Dr. C. V. Brahma Chary (Guntur)
5. Mr. V.V.S. Rama Rao (Hyderabad)
6. Mr. T. Lalith Kumar (Tirupati)
7. Mr. K. Narayana Reddy (Tirupati)

Gujarat

8. Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar (Ahmedabad)
9. Mr. R. C. Saxena (Baroda) *

Karnataka

10. Mr. G. Giridhar Prabhu (Mangalore)
11. Mr. K.C.P. Setty (Mysore)

Kerala

12. Prof. Babu Joseph (Kottayam)

Maharashtra

13. Mr. M. Temurde (Chandrapur)

14. Mr. Ajit Narde (Kolhapur)
15. Dr. Subash Athale (Kolhapur)
16. Mr. Shankar Patil (Kolhapur)
17. Mr. S. V. Raju (Mumbai)
18. Mrs. Kashmira Rao (Mumbai)
19. Dr. Mary Thomas (Mumbai)
20. Mr. Sanjay Panse (Mumbai)
21. Mr. Ashok Karnik (Mumbai) *
22. Prof. V. K. Sinha (Mumbai)
23. Dr. R. Srinivasan (Mumbai)
24. Mr. M. Mukundan (Mumbai)
25. Mr. Naozer Aga (Mumbai) *
26. Mr. Krishan Khanna (Mumbai)
27. Mr. Parimal Shah (Mumbai) *
28. Mr. Nilesh Thakre (Mumbai)
29. Mr. Sameer Wagle (Mumbai)
30. Mr. S. Ramachandran (Mumbai)
31. Mr. Rajeev Ketkar (Mumbai) *
32. Mr. A. V. Gopalakrishnan (Mumbai)

Tamil Nadu

33. Mr. S. Arunajatesan (Chennai)
34. Prof. S. Radhakrishnan (Chennai)
35. Mr. Venkateswara Prasad (Chennai)
36. Mr. D. Raman (Ooty)

(* did not attend on March 12)

The proceedings began by condoling the demise of the following eminent liberals some of whom were members of the Indian Liberal Group.

1. Condolence

Dr. Freddie Mehta who passed away on 19 June 2005 was an outstanding economist and a leading Executive of the House of Tatas. He was among the early members of the Indian Liberal Group in the 'sixties when he participated regularly in programmes organised by it.

Mr. C. R. Irani, life member of the ILG, Managing Director and Editor in Chief of the leading Kolkata daily *The Statesman*, passed away on July 23, 2005. Mr. Irani was a fearless champion of press freedom and was the recipient of many awards from his peers in the international press. With great courage he defied censorship regulations during the Emergency despite having to undergo considerable personal harassment.

Mr. V. Karthik - We also mourn the sudden and untimely passing away of young Karthik of the Chennai Chapter of the ILG. He was 20 years of age. An active participant in the activities of the ILG's Chennai Chapter, he had qualities of leadership which marked him out as a future leader of the ILG.

Dr. S. P. Sathe, the outstanding constitutional expert who delivered the keynote address at the Second National Convention in Mangalore passed away on March 10, 2006. Though he was not a formal member of the ILG as we had differences over the meaning of the word socialism, we were one where the philosophy of the rule of law is concerned. His demise is a great blow to all of us.

J. M. Lobo Prabhu Birth Centenary

The Convention then went on to remember Mr. J. M. Lobo Prabhu an outstanding liberal from Mangalore on his Birth Centenary year.

Mr. J. M. Lobo Prabhu was a Swatantra party member of the fourth Lok Sabha representing the Udupi parliamentary constituency.

Educated at Mangalore, Madras and London Mr. Lobo Prabhu and Minoos Masani were contemporaries at the London School of Economics. He passed the ICS Examination at the age of 21, without even having finished his graduation and returned to India as a member of the Indian Civil Service or the ICS as it was famously known.

Lobo Prabhu commenced his civil service career as Collector of Gorakhpur. His career typically comprised alternating between the State Secretariat and District postings in far-flung areas generally regarded as punishment for uncompromising forthrightness in his functional style. He accepted them gamely, and sought to transform his administrative space as best he could.

Lobo Prabhu joined the Party in 1964 and was the Party's candidate in the 1967 elections to the Fourth Lok Sabha from the Udupi constituency in Karnataka and won his election. He was elected Secretary of the Parliamentary Party and was a studious parliamentarian particularly active during the Budget Sessions bringing to bear his own administrative experience and interest in Public Finance. After he lost in the 1971 elections, he continued as

a writer and commentator mainly in *Insight* weekly which he edited along with his wife Louella who continued to edit the journal after his demise in May 1999 at the age of 94.

His was a family of Liberals. Louella who was his close political associate was also active in the Swatantra Party and at the time of demise a life member of the ILG. Her daughter Giselle enrolled herself recently as a life member of the ILG.

The Convention recorded its tribute to an outstanding Liberal on his birth centenary and paid homage to his memory.

The Convention then turned to the business before the Convention.

2. Expectations and performance of the ILG after its revival and restructuring in 2000

In his report on the state of the ILG's organisation, the president, Mr. S. V. Raju dealt with the subject in four parts: Who is Responsible for the revival and restructuring of the ILG; why did he do it; how did he go about restructuring the ILG; what were his expectations; and why he now wants to opt out.

Mr. Raju accepting responsibility for taking the initiative for reactivating and restructuring the ILG explained the circumstances in the nineties when the process of economic reforms were initiated by the then ruling establishment. He confessed that his hope was actually to revive the Swatantra Party in which task he had the blessings of Minoo Masani. Having failed in this effort he did the next best thing: revive and restructure the ILG, then lying dormant. The objective was to keep the liberal point of view alive.

Restructuring the ILG

The restructuring exercise was done methodically between 1998 and 2000, and in consultation with over a hundred people. This involved three regional workshops; two national workshops; five workshops at the state level and a national symposium to spell out Liberal policy on several basic issues.

The ILG was restructured in March 2000 with a Constitution and a set of Basic Principles. Soon thereafter we began enrolling members. Over 400 members were enrolled by 2002. The first National Convention was held in December 2002.

Expectations

Around the time we began the process of restructuring, economic reforms had already started slowing down. If civil society (and we in the ILG are a part of that civil society) did not mount a massive offensive on a wide range of fronts which had a bearing on economic reforms then, the reforms would not succeed.

The hope was that that the revival of the ILG would result in the Liberals making themselves heard and seen to be active in the public realm. If the ILG could do this, the Liberal position would be seen and accepted as a credible alternative to an altogether unsatisfactory *status quo*. And, above all, I hoped the nucleus of a future liberal party would emerge even while the ILG retained its non-party identity having in its ranks members belonging to several parties.

When we found that the ILG was not taking off in the manner we thought it would we attributed it to the fact that perhaps the ILG structure was too cumbersome having too many layers. Therefore, at the very first Convention we amended the constitution to reduce the layers to just two local chapters and the national organisation.

I was convinced that the local chapters, would be the key to the ILG's organisational effectiveness. They were designed to be autonomous within the parameters of the ILG's Constitution and policies and free to take action on their own. The local chapter president as much as the president at the national level was enabled to choose his team. This would contribute to good teamwork – so I thought.

Thus Local Chapters would provide the flexibility needed to ensure the active participation of all its members. It was our hope that with this change in the constitution we would be able to form a hundred Local Chapters around the country by the end of 2004 or 2005. These Chapters would meet once a month and thus foster activity at the grass roots level. Without such active participation, the ILG would become like any other top-heavy organisation with very little to show at the grass roots and in such an event there was no reason for an organisation like the ILG to exist.

Unfortunately this did not happen. I was obviously living in a dream world. In the first place in all cases the local chapters turned out to be city or town chapters. The amendment to the Constitution did not improve matters. With intra-city or even intra-town distances being the excuse for the local chapters not being able to meet even once a month.

The number of active local chapters has gone down from 7 to 4 and, of these, only one is really functioning. Interestingly it is active because the local chapter president ignored the constitutional stipulation about a monthly meeting and improvised as he went along and did what he felt would bring results. His chapter has Liberal Youth Clubs with over 1000 members. He has found a way of engaging in a variety of monthly programmes. His programmes are largely self-financed with the ILG-NHQ chipping in when there is a request for help.

National Conventions did not attract much attendance either. In 2002 and 2003 there was an encouraging level of activities - But with plenty of ILG-NHQ initiative. But by 2004 activities started tapering off. The First National Convention (December 2002) was attended by 100 delegates; the Second National Convention (February 2005) had 50 delegates; this, the Third National (Special) Convention registered 36 delegates.

Membership

The number of members hovered between 250 and 400. This by itself was not something to worry about because our members made up in quality and talent what we lacked in numbers. At the same time, ironically, the very quality and talent of many members resulted in their inability to spare time for the ILG, preoccupied as they were with their businesses, professions and careers. Then why did they become members. They did so for a very good reason. They agreed with our principles and policies. They subscribed to liberal values and wanted to 'belong' to the family of liberals.

But I didn't anticipate this at that time. On the contrary I imagined that the ILG could put their talent and perhaps their influence to good use to promote the liberal philosophy and values. We therefore developed a Directory of Members. We categorised them into various interest groups. There were as many as 45 such groups listed in the Directory. We hoped that these groups sharing the same values would interact with each other in the areas of their interest. Even this did not happen.

Which led me to analyse why a person chose to become a member of the ILG. And came up with the following reasons:

- Some joined the ILG because his or her friend asked them to.
- Some joined because they were told they could visit Devlali where the LSP had a training centre.
- Others aware of the FNS connection hoped, by becoming a member, to get a chance to visit Germany, Korea, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan or at least some other part of India.
- Some felt membership of the ILG would look good on their CV.

- Some, as mentioned earlier, wanted to ‘belong’.

The Project for Economic Education (PEE), which was until March 31, 2005 a part of the Leslie Sawhny Programme (LSP also founded by Mino Masani) had been organising, since 1985, numerous programmes with the support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (15 years before the ILG was re-structured). After the ILG was revived, the PEE not only associated the ILG in its programmes but also tailored some of these to promote a better understanding of the ILG’s economic, political and social philosophy. Effective April 1 2005, the PEE was detached from the LSP and the LSP itself was suspended. This had its ripple effect on the ILG which had to drastically curtail its programmes as the notice that PEE/LSP assistance would no longer be available was just about three months. The ILG was now less attractive to all those who had joined it for reasons other than support for its objectives.

One could generalise and bemoan the absence of dedication. But just as Chennai was the exception to the rule in so far as organisation was concerned, the work on the Liberal Budgets proved to be the exception in so far as dedicated membership was concerned, particularly the members of the Drafting Group. We produced three Liberal Budgets in as many years. Five of the seven members of the Drafting Group are life members of the ILG; all of them are very busy professionals but they contributed a tremendous amount of time for this task without expectation of any kind of fee or reward. The Liberal Budgets finally gave the ILG some amount of visibility.

There are lessons to be learnt from these two examples viz.,

- there is dedication to the concept and philosophy of liberalism and liberal values even if members do not attend meetings;
- that, perhaps, the ILG should develop around activities;
- that members would be prepared to give time if they found activities worthwhile;
- that the question often asked by those whom we wish to persuade to become members of the ILG “What’s in it for me” is legitimate even if it sounds selfish. The ILG needs to provide an answer that is convincing and personally satisfying to the enquirer; and arising from this,
- let us accept the truism that organisations are not end in themselves. They are merely means to an end.

I have been the recipient of much learned advice on how to organise from well meaning members, but if there is no interest, no dedication, what kind of organisation are we building and for whose benefit.

It is this line of thought based on the experience of the ILG’s organisational growth or the lack of it that convinced me

- that when reviving the ILG six years ago in March 2000 and providing it with a structure we made the structure an end in itself;
- that while we expect members who join the ILG to believe in its objectives, it is unwise to be too critical of those who join us for other reasons;
- that it rests on the leadership to accept the organisation’s limitations and get the best out of its members. As was proved not only in the two instances referred to above and in commendable examples of one-person efforts - for example, Mr. D. Raman, our member in Ooty has been regularly representing the ILG at the monthly meetings of the Collector, to discuss local issues. After each such meeting he sends us a report on what transpired; of Mr. Girdhar Patil of Nasik who convenes or participates in meetings convened by other organisations with a liberal content; of Dr. Subhash Athale and Mr. Ajit Narde of Kolhapur who find publishing little booklets in Marathi the right way to answer dogmatic socialists who misrepresent Liberalism; of Ms. Anjali Patil who organised some months ago, in association with some local colleges, seminars and discussions on issues relating to economic reforms including the important issue of employment

that bothered the student community. These are individual initiatives valuable in themselves and which point the direction for the ILG to follow and which do not need elaborate structures.

3. Does the ILG have a role to play. If so, in what way?

In late 2004 and early 2005, an organisation expert from Germany conducted two workshops entitled: A Five Year Plan for the ILG to help the ILG discover its moorings and to define clear-cut objectives and lay down tasks to be undertaken. The participants at the two workshops volunteered to undertake various tasks alongside agreed deadlines to complete these tasks and revert to ILG-NHQ. Barring one person, none else reverted. Personally, I was not surprised. The problem in my experience was not lack of know-how on organised work, but of a fact our members reminded me more than once, and that too publicly that they were 'volunteers' and not 'employees' of the ILG implying thereby that they could not be asked to explain 'non-performance' of tasks undertaken by them!

The ILG is perhaps the only organisation that is totally devoted to the propagation and defence of the Liberal philosophy. This philosophy believes that an open society and an open economy are two sides of the same coin. Hence, in my view, its active presence in India's polity is important and necessary, particularly now when the enemies of a free market and a free society are doing their best to turn the clock back to the bad old days of statist rule.

My critique so far has not been on the validity of the ILG's objectives but on its poor performance. In such situation where the ILG is drifting aimlessly, this special convention has before it three options:

- One: Wind up the ILG and go home.
- Two: Accept my resignation, elect a new president, carry on as usual.
- Three: Accept reality and reorganise ourselves.

Mr. Raju left the choice to the wisdom of this Convention. To enable it to do so, he tendered his resignation as president of the ILG effective 1st April 2006. In this connection, he also informed the house that he had received letters of resignation from our Treasurer, Mr. Sidney Pinto (on grounds of poor health) and from Mr. G. Giridhar Prabhu (to facilitate the next president to choose his or her team). These two resignations were not necessary because when the president resigns, barring of course the two vice presidents who were elected by the delegates at the last national convention, his nominees *ipso facto* cease to hold office.

In the discussions that followed Mr. Raju's presentation, the following took part:
 Prof. Babu Joseph, Dr. L.S.N. Prasad, Mr. Venkatateswara Prasad, Mr. R. C. Saxena, Mr. Krishan Khanna, Mr. Naozer Aga, Dr. Subhash Athale, Prof. S. Radhakrishnan, Mr. C. Narendra, Dr. C. V. Brahmachary, Mr. Sameer Wagle, Mr. Parimal Shah, Mr. Ashok Karnik, Mr. V.V.S. Rama Rao, Mr. S. Arunajatesan, Mr. K.C.P. Setty, Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, Mr. G. Giridhar Prabhu, Prof. V. K. Sinha, Dr. Mary Thomas, Mr. A. V. Gopalakrishnan, Mr. K. Narayana Reddy, Mrs. Kashmira Rao, Mr. D. Raman, Dr. Y. Sivaji, Mr. M. V. Temurde, Mr. Shankar Patil, Mr. M. Mukundan, Mr. S. Ramachandran and Mr. Nilesh Thakre.

Among the points made by these speakers were:

- Mr. Raju's resignation is not the answer to the ILG's problems
- The ILG should concentrate on enrolling 1000 members
- A National Coordinating Committee must be set up
- The ILG must not close down (a view of most of the above speakers)
- This Convention cannot decide to wind up the organisation
- IIG is intolerant of capitalism

- ILG lacks focus. Should concentrate on governance
- The ILG should go back to its earlier unstructured status
- Freeze the Constitution
- Let ILG be an umbrella organisation and coordinate activities at the state level
- Pool of expertise not being put to use
- Teamwork lacking
- Need to identify local leaders of the ILG to work out strategy
- Should not depend on a single source for funding ILG activities
- Mr. Raju should not resign
- Need for full timers to run ILG activities
- Need for involvement of ILG in social issues
- Structure is needed for organisation's management
- The ILG label is useful in presenting a distinct point of view
- ILG is an intellectual group hence numbers not important
- Need for training programmes at the student level
- Chapters not important but NHQ must keep in touch with members
- Current crisis arises from the absence of support from the FNSt
- The objective is quite diffused. Liberalism is not a distinct ideology
- Constitution of the ILG means that it is a perpetual organisation
- We must respect Mr. Raju's decision to step down.
- General lack of interest of members. Lots of talk very little action
- Lack of funding
- ILG is not a social organisation
- ILG has to combat religious and Left/Right fanaticism
- ILG should not be equated with political parties
- What are we expecting? We are not a mass movement
- ILG's task is to educate
- Members must share the burden of funding the ILG
- The existing system must be continued till the next Convention
- The ILG must be registered
- The Liberal Newsletter must be revived.

There was near unanimity that the ILG should not be wound up. The next option was to consider the resignation of Mr. Raju from the presidentship and action arising therefrom. After considerable discussion a motion by several members requesting Mr. Raju to withdraw his resignation was passed with one dissenting vote. The person casting the dissenting vote wanted Mr. Raju's resignation to be accepted.

Responding to the motion requesting him to withdraw his resignation, Mr. Raju regretted his inability to do so. He said that since the large majority of members had made this request he would be prepared to keep his resignation in abeyance if the delegates were prepared to consider his third option, viz. "Accept reality and reorganise the ILG". He drew attention to a suggestion made by Mr. Naozer Aga and subsequently by Prof. S. Radhakrishnan and Prof. Babu Joseph that the Constitution of the ILG be kept in abeyance for a period of two years ending March 31, 2008. If this was acceptable to the delegates then he would be prepared to head the ILG as National Coordinator for the two years ending March 31, 2008 and to reorganise the ILG in the light of the experience gained by him so far. In view of this offer, the following resolution moved by Prof. Radhakrishnan and seconded by Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar and Prof. Babu Joseph was adopted with one dissenting vote:

"Resolved that in view of the slow growth of the ILG in the last five years since its re-structuring, this special national convention has decided to hold in abeyance the operation of all provisions of the Constitution other than articles 1, 2 and 3 viz. Name, Objectives and Headquarters, for a period of two years beginning 1st April 2006 and ending 31st March 2008, and to appoint a National Coordinator to direct, manage and revitalise the organisation in pursuance of the declared objectives of the ILG.

“Resolved that the next National Convention be convened in March/April 2008 to review the progress made and decide on further action.

“Resolved further that Mr. S. V. Raju be nominated National Coordinator with the right to nominate a team of Coordinators to assist him in this task..”

With the adoption of this resolution, the Special National Convention concluded its business. The president thanked members for the confidence reposed in him and said he would do his best to rebuild the ILG into a well-knit and effective organisation of Liberals.

The meeting then terminated with a vote of thanks proposed by Mr. Giridhar Prabhu.