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*With the Compliments
of*

Mr. N. Dandekar, I.C.S. (Retd.)

The attached copy of a Note
I sent to Shri Morarji Desai
on 10th April, 1975, three
days before he gave up his
fast-~~into-death~~, may be of
interest to you.

Mr. M.R. Masani,
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I am often asked: "What do you think of Morarji's fast?". In fact, most well-wishers and friends of Morarjibhai are anxiously perplexed about

- what is really the object of the fast ?
- Is a fast-unto-death justifiable at all, ever, in any circumstances ?
- In any event, what does he hope to achieve ?

When I think over these questions, I am reminded of the thousands who cheerfully suffered long terms of imprisonment and even banishment, and of the many who committed suicide, in Czechoslovakia and in Austria when Hitler with his hordes marched in to "unite" them with the "Fatherland" in 1938 (or was it early 1939?), and in Russia and China; and of the many who later re-acted the same way when the Communists took over Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and could not be shaken off despite revolts in later years which were ruthlessly suppressed.

2. Fundamentally, it is essentially a question of the finer emotions, reason and the spirit of a man, all reaching the breaking point when the socio-political environment makes life as a free individual so utterly and absolutely intolerable that even death seems preferable. But when a person like Morarji who is really spiritually brave encounters such an environment, he does not immediately end his life by committing suicide by self-immolation or otherwise; he clings to the perhaps utterly hopeless-hope that it may just conceivably be possible to redress the situation by the moral-cum-spiritual force of fasting unto death.

3. The circumstances, which, as he felt, compelled Morarji to take this extreme step can be briefly summarised:

- (1) (a) In Gujarat, as a result of a popular uprising, a corrupt Government was displaced last year by President's Rule. All norms of constitutional and political behaviour required that fresh elections to the State Legislature should have been held within six months. But everyone, including the Central Government, knew well what the outcome would be. So the President's Rule was continued indefinitely on the ground, first, of a phoney "Emergency". And when that became an indefensible ground, the equally phoney ground now urged is the impossibility of holding Elections while the Famine Relief Works are in full swing.
- (b) For one like me who, as a former Civil Servant, has conducted Elections in the past and also administered Famine Works, it is quite impossible to see how the one is rendered impracticable by the other. And I have also myself successfully contested elections to the Lok Sabha twice. Most election meetings are always held in the evenings, when the men and women (the voters) return to their villages after their day's work in the fields is over. How will their being engaged in Famine Works made any difference? So far as the officials actively engaged on Famine Works are concerned, certainly some of them, but not the civil engineering staff, may have to be diverted to Election Duties for 3 or 4 days. The Heavens will certainly not fall in Gujarat by such diversion of the non-engineering staff to Election work even for a whole week.

(c) What then is one to make of these excuses except that they are politically motivated, deliberately designed to mislead, and known to be so ?

- (2) In contrast to this, the Legislature in Bihar is not being dissolved and the Govt. is determined not to hold a fresh election for just the opposite reason. Everyone knows that the Bihar Legislature ceased long ago to be representative of popular opinion. Recent events have shown that the Ministry in Bihar also ceased to be representative of the "majority" legislatures, even in the present "rump legislature" of Bihar.

And it is now being reconstituted. In fact there is no Government worth the name in Bihar at all; and certainly what is most rampant in that State is not famine but corruption. So what prevents fresh elections being held in Bihar ?

4. In the face of such utterly unresponsive, dictatorial and unethical attitude of the Central Govt., what should a man in public life like Morarji who, unlike the vast majority of us, is both highly perceptive and sensitive, do ?

5. The standard answers for most of us, depending upon the weakness or strength of our moral convictions in the cause we espouse, would be:

- to do nothing but talk, talk and talk;

or to keep banging our dissenting heads against a stone wall;

or to court imprisonment;

or, if we lack in the strength of our moral courage but are nevertheless highly perceptive and sensitive to the point of desperation, (like those in Russia, China, Austria, Czechoslovakia), to commit suicide!

But, for the brave, and morally and spiritually strong men like Morarji, the only acceptable answer is to persist in the endeavour to seek redress by the ultimate non-violent way of a fast-unto-death.

6. Will Morarji succeed ? Frankly, "God only knows"; and He won't tell! To a lay-man like me, success seems doubtful. For there are too many, entrenched too long, in too much power to permit that to happen. Men have been allowed to die for their beliefs; and some have even been killed.

7. But must pre-determined, or even eventual success, be the final test of righteous conduct ? And who knows, but that Morarji may yet succeed ? There is a lively possibility, - at/* the true sense, - that those hundreds of thousands men and women now engaged of famine works in Gujarat will "down tools", refusing to go back to work even at the risk of slow starvation of themselves, their children and their cattle, unless and until Elections to the State Legislature in Gujarat are immediately announced.

(Sd/-)
(N. Dandekar.)

Bombay,
10.4.1975.
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/*any rate, that is my earnest hope,
a "pious hope" in