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Text of Mr. M.R. Masani's speech while moving the
main Resolution on the restoration of Civil Liberties
and Democratic processes at the All India Civil
Liberties Conference in Ahmedabad on October 15, 1975.

Mr. Chairman,

This, I believe, is a constructive and reasoned Resolution befitting the Citizens for Democracy, who are not a partisan or political body but one of citizens without party affiliation and activity who have come together in defence of democratic processes and civil rights. You, Sir, and Mr. M.C. Chagla this morning have really said almost all that has to be said on this Resolution.

Yesterday, on the plane coming from Bombay, I was reading the London Economist denouncing the repression in South Africa and it complained bitterly that in South Africa people could be detained without trial and without cause and the only way in which their friends and others can learn of their detention is through the press. It seems to me that we have struck a new low in repression since in India even the press is not allowed to tell us who is detained and where.

Mr. Chairman, if our freedom is to be restored and maintained, what is to be done? As a student of history since I resigned from Party leadership and politics in 1971, I would like to ask a few questions of this Conference as to why this has happened to us. Why this "nightmare", as it was so well described this morning? Why, as the British press has quite rightly asked, has there been so little resistance to these assaults on the people's rights and why have the people of India surrendered their liberties so easily? I think Sir, that this Conference should endeavour to give answers to these questions so that when the Emergency ends, as it must some day, we shall have learnt its harsh lessons and build better on what has gone before.

Mr. Chagla said this morning that the Emergency declared on June 26 was the original sin from which all our present evils emanate. In one way of course he is right, but I would like to question whether the world began on the 26th of June, 1975? What happened on that day was the culmination of what had gone before for the last twenty-five years since Independence. The Fourth Republic in France did not fall and France did not turn to De Gaulle on a particular day by whim or caprice. The Fourth Republic fell because the politicians of the Fourth Republic had played the fool, because they were selfish and Party minded. And because the people of France were bored and fed-up with them, they threw them out and brought in De Gaulle as a powerful President. That is what I as a student of history feel is happening here and I would like to recall that precept of Mahatma Gandhi; "turn the searchlight inwards", and suggest we do what Gandhiji suggested for a few minutes this morning in order to ascertain why this horrible thing had to happen to the Indian people.

Why are we where we are today? I would suggest, Mr. Chairman, two basic causes. The first is the character of our public life, the

fragility of our democracy, and the absence of an infrastructure of grass roots vigilance and voluntary organisation without which the political parties floated on top with no roots below. Mr. B. K. Majumdar put it beautifully in his words of welcome when he said democracy is almost a flavour, something very delicate, something intangible, something of the spirit. Now, that is what I am talking about. Did we have the flavour of democracy all these years? Did we show our fitness to enjoy the freedom the Constitution gave us? Did our politicians -- there are some of them here, some of them Members of Parliament -- play the game? Did we put the country before party? Did we put the country before self? Did those in office show a readiness to give up office or did they cling to it like leeches? Did those in opposition get together to give the country a united opposition and an alternative government? The answer is "No". We in opposition certainly played the fool as much as those in Government. We were undisciplined, some of us often defied the Speaker, invited contempt on Parliament and, when efforts were made by some of us to get together they were sabotaged by some of my friends who are today detained in prison. I remember sadly the 3rd of January, 1971, when our efforts to bring about something that Rajaji dreamt about, "a Grand Alliance" based on an agreed programme, were sabotaged by some of my friends in prison today. All these chickens have now come home to roost.

I do not see my friend B.G. Mavlankar here. Many years ago, in 1962, he invited me to give a talk on the Indian Party system at the Harold Laski Institute here, and I had at that time described these evils of Indian democracy. I had warned: "If we do not stop misbehaving like this, the day is not far distant when people will turn away from us and seek escape from us."

That day has now come. The people of India have not shown that passionate concern for democracy that they could have done, because we who were in power or in Parliament behaved in a way that forfeited their confidence. This is not something peculiar to India.

Mr. Walter Lippman in his book The Public Philosophy wrote many years ago, and he was not referring to India :-

"If the people find that they must choose whether they will be represented in an assembly which is incompetent to govern or whether they will be governed without being represented there is no doubt at all as to how the issue will be decided. They will choose authority which promises to be paternal in preference to freedom which threatens to be fratricidal. For large communities cannot do without being governed. No ideal of freedom or democracy will long be allowed to stand in the way of their being governed ...

A continuing practical failure to govern will lead -- no one can say in what form and under what banners -- to counter-revolutionary measures for the establishment of strong government. The alternative is to withstand and to reverse the descent towards counter-revolution."

I have said all this, Mr. Chairman, to point out that what happened

on the 26th of June was not an accident but a punishment for the way we behaved after we got our Independence.

That, I believe, is the first cause of our plight today. The second cause has to do with the economic pattern which was embodied in our Five Year Plans since the Second Five Year Plan in the fifties. We had adopted an economic pattern which was not compatible with democracy. Statism, which we call "socialism" in India, cannot for long co-exist with democracy. One or the other has to go. Many of us said in Parliament throughout the sixties that if we went on with this "permit licence raj", with the concentration of political and economic power in the same hands, Parliamentary democracy would shrivel up and die. The ugly fruit of that Statism is reflected in the role of big business today. We have watched with pain the deputations in New Delhi between the 12th and 25th of June. We have watched with nausea one business chamber or organisation after another waiting in deputation for a very unworthy purpose. It is now clear this kind of Statism is not compatible with democracy. As and when we regain our freedom, we shall have to see that political and economic power are distributed in the way that Mahatma Gandhi wanted.

These developments are not peculiar to India and should not really surprise us because, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, that great Italian political philosopher, Benedetto Croce, warned that a free society and democracy would not survive unless there were within it autonomous social forces such as the landed farmer, the shop-keeper, the factory owner and the self-employed professional man like the doctor, lawyer, auditor or consultant. He explained that unless these elements who had economic strength were there, no Constitution could guarantee freedom because everyone would be an employee, tenant or agent of the Government. When that was so, who would oppose or dissent?

So, Mr. Chairman, this is not the time to create a new demonology. Hitler was not an accident. Stalin did not come out of a vacuum. These people came to the top because certain social and economic conditions existed which facilitated their emergence, of which they could take advantage. I would like to suggest that it is in this spirit of historical enquiry that we should accept our own share of the responsibility in letting our people down.

Having said this, we now turn to the operative part of this Resolution. Obviously, the job of the Citizens for Democracy is to educate. We have to "educate our masters", as a British politician said many years ago. That is our basic task. But our immediate task, as has been rightly pointed, is to campaign for the restoration of civil liberties and democratic processes today. This is something to which all of us can heartily agree.

We have indicated in the Resolution the conditions under which free elections can be held. The Prime Minister has said more than once that she wants elections and she has also said that the elections can only be held when there is the right climate. That

is correct. Our definition of the right climate is the removal of MISA from the political scene, the release of detained political leaders and the removal of the fetters on the press because, without these three preconditions, general elections would be a fraud on the people of India and will not carry any weight either in India or abroad. I think that the interests of the Prime Minister also lie in agreeing to these three preconditions for an election. In our own moderate language, we have invited her to turn away from the path of confrontation to the path of a democratic dialogue, to enter into a dialogue so that everyone may know what the people of India want. The Resolution quite rightly says that fear is not an instrument on which anyone can rely for long and that discipline which is imposed by fear cannot last very long and has crumbled in one country after another overnight, with very sad consequences for those in office and for the people of those countries. It is our desire, Mr. Chairman, to stop India from facing these ugly possibilities and so the operative part of the Resolution invites the Government to retrace its steps. On the basis of its own claims that there is no violence in this country, that there is no disorder in this country, what is the Emergency for? That is the question to which we think the country is entitled to an answer.

We want the people of India to breathe freely again. I remember what you said, Sir, this morning, that a country like this which, through the centuries, has survived horrible tyrannies and foreign invasions and faced calamities like what happened to Patna recently, and yet has come on top with its spirit undaunted, is not going to be destroyed by a passing phenomenon of this kind. History did not begin on the 26th of June, nor is it going to end this year or the next either. People who think that what has happened is here to stay lack a sense of history. Unlike them, let us have faith in the people of India to save the country and its future.