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India is currently suffering from universal ~~nausea~~ ^{nausea} with the politicians. Gone is the euphoria that had marked the end of the Emergency and the establishment of the Janata Government in April 1977.

Till July 1979, the Indian political scene was fairly static and stagnant. People had ^{somehow} got used to the constant wranglings within the Janata Government and Party and the progressive deterioration in the maintenance of law and order. It was felt that, in this long suffering country, despite the rare combination of arrogance and ineptitude that Mr. Morarji Desai's Government had displayed, they would somehow go on bumbling ~~along~~ till the general elections to Parliament ^{came} ~~to come~~ ⁱⁿ March 1982 and that they would then be thrown out unceremoniously by a disgusted electorate.

The unfortunate choice between an effete and disintegrating Janata Party on the one hand and Mrs. Indira Gandhi backed by her son on the other ^{which was widespread} ~~caused a~~ ^{caused} such concern that many people began to look around for the emergence of a "Third Force" which could channelise the growing discontent and disillusionment away from Mrs. Gandhi.

A notable effort in that direction was made by the Chief Minister of Karnataka State, Mr. Devraj Urs (recently elected President of the partially re-united Congress Party), who broke ^{away} ~~off~~ from Mrs. Gandhi and her Congress (I) at the end of June on the ground that she was not prepared to keep her son Mr. Sanjay Gandhi at a distance from the levers of power and projected the idea of a re-united Congress Party in which all old Congressmen could be got together, excluding only Mrs. Gandhi at one end and Prime Minister Morarji Desai on the other. When I happened to meet Mr. Urs during a courtesy call in Bangalore on the 7th of July, he indicated ~~that~~ that he would need a year in which

to consolidate his forces ~~at both the national and the state level~~. At that time there was no reason to feel that he would not get that much breathing space.

A Landslide

But in this particular case, while Mr. Urs proposed, Mr. Raj Narain disposed. This man, who till then had been regarded as a light weight ~~and described by the London Times as the "clown prince"~~, started only a few days later what turned out to be a veritable landslide in Indian politics. Mr. Raj Narain, accompanied by a few MPs ~~of the Janata Party~~, resigned from the Party and asked the Speaker of ~~the~~ Lok Sabha (House of the People) to allot them a separate bloc of seats. This was followed by a further trickle of defections ~~of Janata MPs~~ which became a tide until the Janata majority eroded and finally disappeared altogether. Mr. Charan Singh, one of the two Deputy Prime Ministers, finally brought up the ~~rear~~ by resigning from the government and the Party.

(A little later, when it was quite clear that the Janata Government had lost its majority in Parliament, Prime Minister Morarji Desai reluctantly tendered his resignation to the President.

President Sanjeeva Reddy did the right thing by inviting the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Y.B. Chavan, to ascertain whether he could form a stable government with a majority in the Lok Sabha. When Mr. Chavan pleaded his inability and returned the mandate to the President, the President invited both the Janata leader Mr. Morarji Desai and Mr. Charan Singh, who by then had assumed the leadership of the Janata (Secular) ^{Party} to ascertain their support in the Lok Sabha and communicate the result to him. On the strength of the two lists that he received, the President was satisfied that Mr. Charan Singh had the support of a larger number of members of Parliament than Mr. Morarji Desai.

The President accompanied his invitation to Mr. Charan Singh to form a

government with the stipulation that he should call an early Session of the Lok Sabha to ~~prove~~^{test} his majority, and this ~~Session~~^S was fixed for the 20th of August.

On the morning of the 20th Augst, however, Mr. Charan Singh found that the Congress(I) which had enabled him to prove the wide measure of his support to the President, ~~had now withdrawn that support~~^{now} and was not prepared to vote for the ~~the~~^a motion of confidence in his government. He thereupon immediately tendered his resignation ^{to} the President even before the House could meet and advised the President to dissolve Parliament and call for fresh elections.

This situation left the President with two alternative courses of action ^{both} well within his discretion. The first was to accept the advice of the retiring Prime Minister and to dissolve Parliament. The other alternative was to respond to the request made by Mr. Jagjivan Ram, the new leader of the Janata Party, that he should be invited to form a government.

On 22nd August, the President announced the dissolution of Parliament and called for elections not later than the end of the year, ~~this provision being intended to ensure that the reservation of seats for Scheduled Cast and Scheduled Tribes did not lapse before the elections.~~^{the} The President also requested Mr. Charan Singh and his cabinet to continue as a caretaker government till the elections and to desist from taking any measures which would be inconsistent with the nature of such a government.

There are two consequences, probably unintended, of this early dissolution of Parliament. The first is to ~~about~~^{to} the process of disillusionment not only with the Janata Government but with the processes of parliamentary democracy which was proceeding apace and ~~deprive~~^{to} the backlash towards authoritarianism of the strength it might otherwise have developed by 1982. While a democrat might rejoice at this, it has also to be conceded that early general elections have made it impossible to ~~debate~~^{debate} in time for these elections a new Liberal

or
of middle-of-the-road party which might conceivably have come into existence during the next two years.

A Black Picture

The entire political scene in India today is a dreary and disheartening one. Never has the disgust with politicians and parties been as widespread as it is now. A poll of public opinion taken towards the end of August 1979 by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion (the Gallup affiliate in India) showed that no less than *76* % of those polled believe that "present day politicians by and large are guided by the exigencies of their own political careers". 59 % expressed the view that this deterioration in political standards had been accentuated over the last two years of ~~the~~ Janata Party rule.

The sad thing is that it can reasonably be argued that there is nothing whatsoever to choose between the three parties contending for power. They have all been guilty of encouraging defections, of "toppling" ^{the} government and of combining with the opponents of yesterday against their comrades without the slightest scruples.

It is perhaps inevitable that, in a country lacking the traditions of individual liberty and grassroots citizenship on which a free society can be based, there should be too much politics and too little citizenship. This natural handicap has, however, been greatly aggravated by the socio-economic pattern with which India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, ^{the country which} endowed ~~it~~ ^{as} he described as "the socialist pattern of society." In practice, this has meant an advanced and obsolete form of State Capitalism ~~in~~ with a big and burgeoning ^{administrative} bureaucracy and controls that invade every walk of life.

The combination of political and economic power in the hands of a few politicians has meant that the ^{stakes} status of office have been raised altogether too high. This has ^{resulted} ~~succeeded~~ not only in corruption but also in an utter lack of scruple in the fight for political office. To the discerning observer ~~it is clear~~

it is clear that India cannot have clean and efficient ^a ~~administration~~ ^{government} unless it is ^{is} also a limited government and that Gandhi was right when he reiterated that "that government is best ~~which~~ governs the least."

What India needs on the socio-economic front is a "U turn". Quite apart from economic benefits of such a step, there can be no doubt that it would mean relieving the tender plant of Indian democracy of the excessive burdens it has been unable to bear without wilting.

Such a "U turn" has already been executed by President J.R. Jayawardene in Sri Lanka with success, but it would be too much to expect any of India's existing political parties to undertake it. In so far as economic policies are concerned, they are all wedded to the state capitalist pattern and are all part of the "New Class", ^{to} borrow Djilas' phrase, which thrives on it.

The Outlook

Whichever way one looks at it, the outlook for the next few years is bleak. It is most unlikely that either the Congress(I) led by Mrs. Gandhi or the Janata Party led by Jagjivan Ram or the coalition of parties and groups which is taking shape under the leadership of Mr Charan Singh, ^{the} ~~present caretaker~~ ^{and Mr. Das} Prime Minister, will get a clear majority in the elections to the Lok Sabha. In the light of what has been happening during the past few months and weeks, can there be any doubt that such a situation will mean instability, with ^{constant} ~~continual~~ efforts at horse trading and ~~to~~ further defections?

The issue in this election will not be democracy versus autocracy. It will be the record of the Janata Government, and the level of prices above all. It is a matter of record that prices in India rose from 1960 continuously up to date, except only during the Emergency when they registered an average fall of 5% per annum.

On present form and ~~writing~~ before the campaign has really got going, all one can say is that, as of now, the tide of public opinion ^{is} flowing in ~~the~~ Mrs. Gandhi's favour. As ^{to} Gandhi's favour.

As the Editor of a leading daily in the capital put it on 8th August, "Mrs. Gandhi is back at the centre of the stage." Both Mr. Charan Singh and Mr. Jagjivan Ram ^{have} made no bones about saying that they would be glad to accept her assistance, though to a dispassionate observer the support so given may recall ~~the~~ Moscow's reply to the CPPB Ramsay MacDonald in the twenties : "We shall support ~~the~~ ^{her} as the rope supports the hanged man."

The only poll of public opinion available is one conducted in August by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion which gives Mrs. Indira Gandhi a combined urban and rural weightage of 110, as against ^{only} 65 for Mr. Morarji Desai, 23 for Mr. Charan Singh and 19 for Mr. Jagjivan Ram.

^{Ironically enough,} Mrs. Gandhi's main attraction is precisely what Liberals like me deplore, namely, her penchant for authoritarianism. Many years ago, in his book, The Public Philosophy, Mr. Walter Lipman had pertinently observed that history showed that when forced to choose between ^a strong and authoritarian ^{regime} ~~government~~ and inept and incompetent democracy, nations ⁰ invariably chose the former.

Mrs. Gandhi seems to have cottoned on to this fact because, speaking in Bombay on 10th September, she did not hesitate to say that "unity and stability are the first requirements of the country; democracy comes later."

^{It is true that} India today suffers from indiscipline in every walk of life - labour, education and politics. What India really yearns for is democracy with discipline and discipline without ~~democracy~~ dictatorship. True, say the cynic, but if we cannot have both, should we not, for a limited period of time, put discipline first and let democracy follow? This is a meretricious plea which has been heard elsewhere.

When the democrat gives expression to his fear of ^{the} what Mrs. Gandhi's return to power may do to rule of law, civil liberties and the freedom of the press, he is met

these days with the plea that these values would not really be endangered because Mrs. Gandhi will on this occasion have neither a clear majority in Parliament nor a rubber stamp President *at her beck and call*.

The Indian electorate, though largely illiterate, has so far shown a *certain measure* of shrewdness and sagacity. It will need all its *wisdom* to deal with these *difficult* complicated and complex *situations* ~~problems~~.