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India's Second Revolution

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MARCH 22, 1977, marked the second revolution in India's contemporary history. Like the first in August 1947, the transfer of power from one regime to another took place peacefully and without bloodshed. The difference was that on the earlier occasion, the Indian people were able, under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, to terminate British rule and replace it in due course with a republic of their own making. On this occasion, led by Jayaprakash Narayan, on whom the mantle of Gandhi has now fallen, the Indian people were able to terminate an authoritarian regime and return to the path of democracy under the constitution of the republic.

This was a ballot-box revolution. On January 11, 1977, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who had ruled under emergency powers since June 26, 1975, suddenly dissolved parliament and called for fresh elections. After a brief campaign, the people voted freely in the middle of March; and on the 22nd of that month, as the results streamed in from distant towns and villages, the figures revealed that the ruling Congress Party had lost disastrously, being reduced to a mere 153 seats in the Lok Sabha, while the opposition coalition under the banner of the Janata Party, along with its ally the Congress for Democracy, got 298 seats—a clear majority in a house of 542. The results were greeted by great crowds celebrating in public places and watching the electric signs reporting on each successive result as it came in. This was a liberation for which most of them had prayed for almost 19 months.

II

The chapter that culminated in these dramatic changes goes back to June 12, 1975. On that day, after 25 years of fairly peaceful history,

the Republic of India started to rock violently. Justice Jag Mohan Sinha of the Allahabad High Court passed judgment on the appeal filed by Raj Narain against Mrs. Indira Gandhi's election to the Lok Sabha from Rae Bareilly in the 1971 general elections. In the course of the judgment, Mrs. Gandhi was not only found guilty of several corrupt practices. What was perhaps even more important was that she was found guilty of not having told the truth when under oath in the witness box. Thus, at one point the judgment said: "The statement made by Respondent No. 1 (Mrs. Gandhi) fails to satisfactorily explain the inconsistencies." At another point, the court observed: "I have given very careful and dispassionate consideration to the aforesaid reply given by Respondent No. 1 during her cross-examination, and I regret my inability to accept it."

There is a certain amount of evidence that Mrs. Gandhi's first instinct was to take the honorable course of resigning as Prime Minister. But it would appear that she was persuaded against her better judgment to cling to her position and adopt a defiant attitude. It was a tragic mistake. In an article in the *Statesman* of June 21, a few days before she was to strike, I gave expression to this view:

By not resigning as Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi has missed a golden opportunity to do the decent thing and win some measure of public sympathy and esteem. If the report is correct that immediately after the verdict of the Allahabad High Court was known she was in two minds on the subject and was later persuaded not to resign as Prime Minister, those who advised her have done not only the country but Mrs. Gandhi a signal disservice . . . If Mrs. Gandhi had resigned as Prime Minister and then appealed to the Supreme Court as an ordinary member of parliament fighting to keep her seat, she could perhaps have become the Prime Minister again with some credibility and dignity if the Supreme Court had decided in her favor. As it is, she has forfeited both.

On the evening of June 25th, the leaders of various democratic political parties, along with Jayaprakash Narayan, appeared on the platform at a rally in the capital to demand Mrs. Gandhi's resignation as Prime Minister and to give the signal for a campaign of *satyagraha*, including a *gherao* (siege) of her residence, to bring about the desired

result. This was obviously just the provocation for which the Prime Minister was waiting. Within hours, an exercise which clearly had been kept ready in every detail was put into operation. On or around midnight of the 25th, not only were Jayaprakash, Morarji Desai, and other national leaders of every political party except the Congress taken into custody and detained under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, but thousands upon thousands of political party functionaries—including some Congressmen—were also rounded up during the early hours of that morning.

Having thus made this constitutional *coup d'état*, the Prime Minister found it fit to convene a meeting of her Cabinet in the early hours of the 26th and to face it with a *fait accompli*. The Cabinet could, of course, have rejected Mrs. Gandhi's request for an endorsement of her move; but it did not. This is a sad reflection of the depths to which the Congress leadership had degenerated.

From that day, I started keeping an Emergency diary. From it, I am now able to recall how the news of the *coup d'état* reached me that morning.

I was woken up early before dawn this morning by a telephone call from A. G. Noorani telling me that Jayaprakash and Morarji had been arrested, and that various other people were being picked up. He had just gathered this from a BBC broadcast. I waited impatiently for the morning newspapers, and noted that they were either ignorant of these developments or had been prevented from reporting them. As I have earlier said: "Midnight is the Prime Minister's most glorious hour." Later on in the day, we learned that Delhi had been deprived of all newspapers by the simple expedient of creating a "power shortage" in newspaper offices alone! This went on for two days, after which the newspapers, duly emasculated, began to reappear . . . Listening to All-India Radio that evening, we learned of the bogus "Emergency" proclaimed by the puppet President. This was on top of the external Emergency already existing. The provocation was the decision of the Opposition Co-ordinating Committee to launch *satyagraha* on Friday, and JP's militant speech with yet one more reference to the Army and the police. It is a pity that once again, JP ignored my plea to him to desist from references to the Army and the police not obeying illegal orders.

How to describe the situation in which we found ourselves? It was in the nature of a nightmare, and yet I would certainly not describe it as either a Communist or a Fascist dictatorship. I saw it as a limited form of authoritarianism from which one could go down the slope to totalitarianism or revert to democratic procedures. One of the more cheering aspects of the situation was that it was reversible.

In such a setting, what was the proper role of a liberal democrat? It was, in my view, to eschew romanticism on the one hand and craven fear on the other. He should endeavor, to whatever extent might be possible within the limits of legality, to assert the rights of the citizen and to seek to expand the bounds of freedom; for in such a climate, even normal calm and courage have a therapeutic value. The almost universal absence of courage which then prevailed is hard to imagine. An editor with a sense of humor managed (in the *Eastern Economist* of July 4, 1975) to get past the unimaginative censor this little gem portraying the prevalent panic.

The livestock population in our country has been variously estimated. In my opinion, the number must be 580 million plus. (The fact that demographers estimated the current human population of our country as 580 million has, of course, nothing to do with my figure.) I have reason to believe that the bulk of this livestock is sheep.

The liberal, maintaining a sense of history, would also be aware that there were historical reasons for such developments, and that a resort to demonology explains little. Bearing this in mind, the liberal would endeavor to find common ground between the warring parties, and to heal the wounds of a divided nation.

As editor of a small monthly journal called *Freedom First* published by a voluntary society, the Democratic Research Service, I found myself embroiled almost immediately with Mrs. Gandhi's censors. When they objected to certain material which was meant for publication, I suspended publication and wrote a letter to our readers explaining that since *Freedom First* could not possibly accept precensorship, we were going to court and hoped that the Courts would sustain us in our right to write as we pleased within reasonable limits. During those days, terror stalked the land. It took me more than a week to find an attorney who would file my petition.

In his book "The Law of Press Censorship in India," S. J. Sorabjee, a redoubtable champion of editors in distress and now Additional Solicitor-General of the Government of India, described the situation as follows.

The question that was uppermost in the minds of all was whether dissent was permissible at all and, if so, what were its limits. An authoritative judicial decision in the matter was the need of the hour. Since courts cannot decide any legal issue without an actual controversy arising before them in the regular course, somebody had to bell the cat. Who was going to perform that feat? It was Minoo Masani who took up the gauntlet.

The law suit went on till April 1976. Finally, a decision of the Bombay High Court sitting in appeal recorded an historic judgment and vindicated our stand, striking down most of the censor's objections as arbitrary and unwarranted. It asserted that the rule of law was still intact. Indeed, throughout those dark days the judiciary proved to be the class that stood out for its courage and determination to stand by the values to which they had sworn allegiance.

By contrast, the press as a whole failed even to take advantage of the support given by the courts. Writing much later on April 17, 1977, Khushwant Singh, editor of India's largest magazine, *Illustrated Weekly*, and himself a supporter of Mrs. Gandhi's regime, was to write bitterly, but not unfairly, in the following vein.

The vast majority of them knuckled under (Information Minister) Shukla's draconian laws and did his bidding—suppressing and distorting news, praising those he wished to be praised, denigrating others he wished to denigrate. These very "gentlemen" today pose as the great champions of the freedom of the press and wax eloquent against others of their profession. All they do now is to indulge in heroics and pin medals on their own chests, after the battle has been won by others.

While saying so, I must record the names of some honorable exceptions: Ram Nath Goenka, Shri Mulgaokar, V.K. Narasimhan, Ajit Bhattacharjea, and Kuldip Nayar of the *Indian Express*; C. R. Irani and Nihal Singh of the *Statesman*; George

Verghese; C. G. K. Reddy; Rajinder Puri; K. R. Sunder Rajan (*Times of India*); as well as others attached to journals like Malkani of the *Organiser*, which was suppressed, as well as A. D. Gorwala (*Opinion*); Minoo Masani (*Freedom First*); and Romesh Thapar (*Seminar*), which closed down under protest. Of the total working force of some 50,000 journalists, the number of those who put up some resistance could not have added up to more than three dozen. This handful has every right to take credit; it does not behoove the others to crow about themselves. L. K. Advani, the new Information and Broadcasting Minister, put it very succinctly: "When you were merely asked to bend, you chose to crawl."

III

From what little news trickled through the censorship, we learned that both Jayaprakash and Morarji Desai were being detained without trial in solitary confinement—Desai in a remote traveller's bungalow and Jayaprakash in the Post-Graduate Institute of Medicine in Chandigarh.

During repression in British days, the Quakers had played the role of conciliators. Unhappy at our inability to do anything for JP and others behind bars and to lighten the burden they were bearing, some of us decided to try and prise the door open by writing to the Prime Minister suggesting the beginning of a dialogue. We wrote to her on August 31, 1975.

An identity of views has developed on certain points which we thought we should share with you. The starting point in this thinking was that, happily, all parties, whether in government or in opposition, are agreed that the people of India should be free to decide their destiny. It is obvious that such a choice can be made freely by the people through a general election to parliament.

We discussed the circumstances in which such an election could take place. It is obvious that, under present conditions, with the kind of precensorship of the press that exists, the detention in prison of a large number of men and women of influence in the country, and the threat of detention without cause and without

trial . . . , no election that would enjoy any credibility could take place. This, in turn, involves that, in order that an election campaign can be conducted fairly and freely, there would have to be freedom of discussion and expression on the platform and in the press for a reasonable period of time without fear of consequences. On the other hand, in order that an election can take place in a calm and orderly fashion, there should be general agreement that extraconstitutional weapons should be placed aside. In such circumstances, the continuance of the Emergency will become unnecessary according to your own statements. You yourself rightly mentioned recently that elections can only take place when there is a proper climate for them.

But how to get Mrs. Gandhi to respond to this sensible advice which, if she had followed it, might have given her back her lost legitimacy? In our letter, we made an offer.

We are hopeful that an arrangement on some such basis as this can be brought about, and we on our part would be prepared to do whatever little we can to help in facilitating such an understanding. We should like to think that you find yourself in accord with this general line of thought, which has been encouraged by your own public statements; and we would appreciate it if four or five of us can call on you at your convenience to discuss these possibilities and to find out if we can be of help to all concerned in this situation.

That letter was signed by several men and women of prominence, some of whom were friends of Mrs. Gandhi and none of whom belonged to any political party. Among my cosignatories were M. C. Chagla, Rajmohan Gandhi, Professor V. V. John, Miss Maniben Kara, V. B. Karnik, Khushwant Singh, Achut Patwardhan, Santhanam, Soli Sorabjee, Mrs. Annu Swaminadhan, Mrs. Marjorie Sykes, and Madame Sophia Wadia. Later, when I showed JP our letter, I was glad to find that he approved of our move.

The reply that ultimately came from the Prime Minister in the shape of a telegram from her Private Secretary ran as follows: "The Prime Minister received your letter. We hope to have a meeting when

the time is somewhat more propitious." Even when this reply came, I could not help deploring the Prime Minister's poor judgment in passing up this offer at conciliation on the part of those who could have perhaps brought the parties together to the extent of getting back to normality and having free and fair elections. As it happened, the Prime Minister delayed for another 18 months; and then, in January 1977, did exactly what we had suggested. The results of the general elections to parliament in March 1977 show that perhaps, after all, Mrs. Gandhi's much-advertised instinct for good timing was somewhat overrated. She could not have chosen a less propitious time to do what she belatedly did.

On November 11, 1975, Jayaprakash was released on grounds of health. In fact, he entered Jaslok Hospital in Bombay a few days later a very sick man, with both his kidneys irreparably damaged while in solitary confinement. JP spent the whole of 1976 in the vale of despair. He found India suppressed and oppressed under an authoritarian regime; the press gagged, with very little real news but full of mendacious propaganda so that, if one started believing what one read, one would get demoralized, as many people did; most of JP's friends and colleagues detained without trial and without a hint as to when their incarceration would end. Perhaps the cross that JP found hardest to bear was his inability to counter the misstatements which he found emanating daily from those in office, and particularly from the Prime Minister.

Another thing that perturbed him greatly were the fatuous remarks in support of the Delhi government that occasionally appeared in the Western press. That Moscow should be found in Indira Gandhi's corner was, of course, taken for granted; but that in the Western democracies, which were our friends and had, in general, shown great understanding and sympathy with us in our travail since June 1975, there should be people who would come to India and go back and praise what they had seen, was too much for JP to bear, particularly since these included former Socialist comrades like Jenny Lee, Aneurin Bevan's widow. JP did not know it then, but other Socialists were to follow in her footsteps, the most notable among them being Michael Foot, the British Labor Cabinet minister and Leader of the House of Commons.

The result was a Letter to the Editor which JP managed to get

across to the London *Times*, and which was published in the first week of June 1976:

It surprises and pains me to find some Western democratic leaders giving certificates to Mrs. Gandhi. Democracy has been nearly destroyed in India, and all powers have been concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister, the entire opposition has been put in prison, the press has been completely muzzled, and the world is fed with one-sided propaganda.

Mrs. Gandhi claims that whatever she has done is according to the constitution. This is true only because she has declared an Emergency which gives, according to the constitution, very large powers to the executive. For instance, as long as the Emergency lasts, Mrs. Gandhi may go on postponing elections to the lower house of the Indian parliament as long as she wishes. She has already done this for a year. However unfair and undemocratic that might be, it would still be constitutional.

As for the Emergency itself being justified or not, I suggest that unprejudiced democratic leaders from the West should come to India and find out if the conditions in this country prior to June 26 (the day Emergency was declared) were such as to justify declaration of Emergency, arrests of thousands of persons, imposition of press censorship of a kind that even the British imperialists had not thought of. Mrs. Gandhi no doubt paints a frightful picture of pre-26th June in India, and makes out as if there was such violence growing in this country, that there was danger even to her life and that of her family (as she told an Italian lady press reporter).

As I was at the head of the people's movement, I affirm with all the sincerity and honesty I possess that there was a minimum of violence, considering the depth and spread of the movement and its intensity, and further that wherever I or my trusted colleagues were able to reach, what isolated violence had broken out was immediately brought under control. In many cases, the violence was provoked by the Congress Party and government

themselves. Mrs. Gandhi's and her government's propaganda is merely to justify her personal dictatorship.

The least Western democrats can do is to desist from issuing chits to Mrs. Gandhi. By doing so, they will only succeed in destroying whatever democracy is left in this country and perhaps in Asia also.

As I am dictating this from my sick-bed in a Bombay hospital, I cannot say more.

By the middle of 1976, when this letter was published, it was possible to see that the regime's arbitrary character was daily getting more marked, and that the restraints which had till then survived were gradually disappearing. Thus, for example, instances of beating up prisoners and of various forms of torture, which till then had been an aberration in exceptional cases, were proliferating and becoming part of the system. It was around the same time that the excesses committed by Sanjay Gandhi and his coterie, including enforced vasectomy and demolition squads, emerged as distinctive features of the Emergency. Lord Acton was certainly right that "absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely."

IV

Suddenly, on June 18, 1977, out of the blue, came the Prime Minister's declaration of the dissolution of parliament. The question has often been put as to why Mrs. Gandhi should have reversed the engines and gone in for the gamble of an election which, as it turns out, she lost. One can only venture a guess. I, for one, was reminded of an old limerick.

There was once a lady from Riga
Who went for a ride on a tiger.
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside,
And a smile on the face of the tiger.

I had often wondered during the preceding months whether Mrs. Gandhi was not asking for the fate of the lady from Riga. Maybe she,

too, wondered about it, judging from the fact that she made a desperate effort to jump off the back of the tiger of authoritarianism before it devoured her.

It is generally agreed that Mrs. Gandhi was trying to secure legitimacy for her authoritarian regime. While acting arbitrarily, in typical Indian fashion she sought a Western-style legitimacy while the economic situation had not yet noticeably deteriorated. She failed miserably as a result of a gross miscalculation, which might fairly be attributed to the fact that those who arrogate power into their own hands are rarely told the unpleasant truth by the sycophants they collect around themselves. In any event, we must all be grateful for this miscalculation. As the *New Republic*, one of her sternest critics in the United States, was to concede when the results were in: "Mrs. Indira Gandhi had the decency to lose an election."

The campaign that led to this debacle was short and sharp, lasting hardly two months. Immediately the detained leaders of political parties were released, they got together with Jayaprakash Narayan, who had already been released on ground of health much earlier. Jayaprakash made it clear to them that unless they immediately formed one party and fought under its banner, he for one would abstain from participating in the election campaign. Jayaprakash's charisma was undoubtedly badly needed by those concerned. That, and the heightened awareness that months of detention must have brought, led to the formation of the Janata Party, which eliminated the splitting of opposition votes on which the Congress Party had thrived for a quarter of a century. This, in turn, meant that the Congress Party, which had never secured a majority of the electorate behind it, but which had ruled India thanks to the vagaries of the British electoral system for 25 years and even undermined its constitution by reason of a fictitious majority in the Lok Sabha, for once suffered from the archaic electoral practice known as "first past the post." (That is, whoever wins a plurality, no matter how small, wins the seat.) This time, the bonus went to the Janata Party which, having got 43.17 percent of the votes cast, secured 298 seats, which gave it 52 percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha; while the Congress Party, which had polled 34.54 percent of the votes cast, secured only 153 seats (30 percent).

Since the press abroad has, by and large, followed the lead of the Indian press in reporting only the number of seats won by each party,

the picture that the world has obtained of the results of these elections has been somewhat oversimplified and distorted. Thus, most readers of Indian news abroad were told that, while the Congress Party was almost totally rejected in the north, where fear had turned into anger, the Janata Party was similarly rejected in the south. Neither statement is quite correct.

Carefully examining the figures published by the Election Commission, we find that those opposed to the Congress Party in the southern states got not less than 42.64 percent of the votes polled in Andhra Pradesh. Again, in Karnataka not less than 43.26 percent voted against the Congress Party. Similarly, in the north we find from official figures that a sizable minority in the northern states voted for the Congress Party. The following figures for some of the major states in the north show the percentage of Congress Party votes cast in each of these states, compared with the corresponding percentage in the 1971 elections in brackets: Assam 50.56 (56.18); Orissa 38.18 (38.46); Punjab 35.86 (45.96); Madhya Pradesh 32.5 (45.6); Rajasthan 30.56 (45.96); West Bengal 29.39 (28.23); Uttar Pradesh 25.04 (48.56); Bihar 22.90 (40.06); Haryana 17.95 (52.56). The Congress vote in the northern states has traditionally been less than 40 percent of the votes cast. It was only in Haryana, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh that it dropped radically on this occasion.

If we had had a system of election such as exists in most democratic countries, the Congress Party should have won a fourth of the Lok Sabha seats from Uttar Pradesh, and a fifth of the seats from Bihar. Similarly, the Janata Party, which was decimated in the south equally unfairly, should have got a fair number of seats from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, and we would have had a more balanced and representative Lok Sabha.

On the basis of this distorted vote-seat ratio, various conclusions have been drawn. Some of these have been in connection with the argument as to whether or not the Acting President was justified in signing the proclamation dissolving the state assemblies in nine states. An equally important issue is that of the north versus the south. It is true that the present parliament presents the unfortunate spectacle of almost all members from the north being on the government benches, while almost all the members from the south are to be found in opposition. Such a development is bad for the unity of the country.

Let it, however, be clearly said that this is not the fault of the people of India but of the electoral system we have adopted from the British. While in Britain it has often distorted the will of the electorate, in India ever since independence it has been an unmitigated disaster and a blight on our young democracy. The British electoral system has enabled a minority party, the Congress, which ever since 1950 has failed to win more than 48 percent of the votes polled in any parliamentary election, to get fictitious parliamentary majorities which it has misused to enact no less than 42 amendments to the constitution, including the infamous 24th, 25th, and 42nd amendments, which have sought to destroy the fundamental rights of the citizen and the rule of law. It has now created an altogether artificial barrier between north and south.

In the elections in the month of June to the state assemblies in some nine states, which arose through the dissolution forced by New Delhi, the pattern of voting showed a certain shift, but not a decisive one. The proportion of those who went to the polls dropped perceptibly, indicating a measure of growing indifference. The Janata Party's majorities were thinner. According to official figures, the Janata vote fell from 65 percent in the March elections to 42.78 percent in the state assembly elections in June in Bihar, from 70 to 46.70 percent in Haryana, from 57 to 49.01 percent in Himachal Pradesh, from 58 to 47.28 percent in Madhya Pradesh, from 65 to 50.41 percent in Rajasthan, from 52 to 49.24 percent in Orissa, from 68 to 48.36 percent in Uttar Pradesh, and from 68 to 52.58 percent in Delhi.

On the other hand, it was clear that the revulsion against the misdeeds of the previous regime, and the fear of Mrs. Gandhi returning to power, were still quite strong and proved decisive. In a peculiar way, Indira Gandhi and the Janata Party are at this moment each bolstering the other even as they seek to destroy each other. Janata's failures and the disappointment that they cause strengthens Indira's faith in her own future, while her refusal to retire from political life provides Janata with a useful bogeyman with whom to frighten the people.

V

Fascinating as is the story of the fall and resurgence of democracy in India, the student of history will seek to get at the deeper meaning of all that has happened during the past two years. Why did this interrup-

tion in the relatively peaceful and democratic life of the people of India take place? Did it *have* to take place, or was it an aberration on which we in India and our friends abroad can now turn our backs and hope to live happily ever after?

As it happened, this issue came up as early as October 15, 1975, when a few bold spirits foregathered in Ahmedabad to hold an All-India Civil Liberties Conference. The inaugural speech was made by a distinguished retired Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court and a former minister in Mr. Nehru's and Mrs. Gandhi's governments. He said that the Emergency declared on June 26 that year was the original sin from which all our evils emanated. In one way, of course, he was right. But as a student of history, I question his major assumption.

I believe that what happened on June 26, 1975, was only the *culmination* of what had gone before for the last 25 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 feel happened in India.

I see two basic causes for the Emergency. 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 organization without which the political parties have floated on top with no roots below. In short, too much politics, too little citizenship. The questions Indian politicians could usefully ask themselves are: Did we show our fitness to enjoy the freedom the constitution gave us? Did we 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 *lêeches*? Did those in opposition till 1975 get together to give the country a united opposition and an alternative government? The answer, quite clearly, is "No" to all of them. 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 among us to get together, they were sabotaged by those who later were detained in prison by Mrs. Gandhi.

Nor was all this difficult to foresee. Many years ago, in 1962, in

the course of a talk on the Indian party system at the Harold Laski Institute in Ahmedabad, I had described these evils of Indian democracy. "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 came in 1975. The people of India had not shown that passionate concern for democracy that they could have shown, because we who were in power or in parliament had behaved in a way that had forfeited their confidence.

The second major cause of the debacle of democracy had to do with the economic pattern which was embodied in our five-year plans since the Second Five-Year Plan in the mid-1950s. We adopted an economic pattern with excessive governmental controls, which was not compatible with democracy. Statism, which we call "socialism" in India, cannot for long coexist with democracy. One or the other must go. Many of us had said in parliament throughout the 1960s that if we went on with the concentration of political and economic power in the same hands, parliamentary democracy would shrivel up and die. The ugly reality which we tasted in 1975 and 1976 showed that this kind of statism is not compatible with democracy.

These developments are not peculiar to India, and should not really surprise us. In the last quarter of the 19th century, the 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 shopkeeper, the factory owner, and the self-employed professional man like the doctor, lawyer, auditor, and consultant. He explained that unless these elements which 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? Bearing all this in mind, I had argued in Ahmedabad in October 1975:

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.

Nirad Chaudhuri, one of India's most courageous writers, states some interesting conclusions in an article he wrote for *Encounter* in January 1977 entitled "How and Why Indira Rules."

Given the regime which was established in India with independence and the conditions in which it worked, Mrs. Gandhi's regime is a natural though pathological development from Nehru's government, instead of being a reaction from it. That is, just as she is his daughter, so is her autocratic authority the offspring of her father's authority. The descent is incontestable, though the filiation has been obscured by certain assumptions, which might be described as sheer illusion . . .

The course of Indian politics ran relentlessly towards a vacuum and, since nature abhors it, the vacuum created by the disappearance of the benevolent personal power of Nehru has been filled up by a different kind of personal power. His daughter has acquired it after a tussle for power lasting over nine years . . .

Such a tyranny as Mrs. Gandhi has established and is sustaining cannot be without a firm basis in the mental and social life of the Indian people . . .

In India, those who have had power have always commanded obedience and submission of the people, and that normally has all the outward appearance of spontaneity and enthusiasm. But these also disappear quickly as soon as power is lost. Then the autocrat who had become the idol of the people is not regretted or venerated even in retrospect.

VI

The few months that have passed since India went through these stirring changes have done little, unfortunately, to discount Chaudhuri's grim analysis.

There is, of course, a great deal to rejoice about—particularly the maturity displayed by the Indian electorate, including the rural masses, who have shown that the poor crave for freedom as much as they want bread. The people of India have shown that they have learned to respond to Mahatma Gandhi's repeated exhortation that

"India must learn to say 'No'." Jayaprakash Narayan was perfectly right when he described the result of the parliamentary elections as being "more an anti-Mrs. Gandhi vote than a pro-Janata Party vote." The quick removal of all restraints on freedom of expression and of the press, and the restoration of the rule of law, by the new government are steps for which we have reason to be grateful.

The satisfaction that these happy developments bring is, however, dented by the obvious dangers that are now surfacing—in particular, a revolution of rising expectations which it may prove difficult to fulfill. The ease with which those in office seized absolute power on June 26, 1975, showed that the faith of the people in democracy and parliamentary institutions had weakened, and that they were prepared to put up with authoritarian rule in the hope that it would solve some of the country's basic problems. Thanks to the 18 months of authoritarianism and its excesses, the people became painfully aware of the need for freedom. But public memory is short. If the politicians now in office were to behave as they have done in the past, then once again the demand for a "strong man at the top" would go up. Next time, the people might turn away from democracy and accept authoritarianism on a much more permanent footing.

It is, of course, too early to judge the new government. Enough, however, has happened on the plane of political behavior and morality to make the observer, however sympathetic, wonder unhappily whether the necessary lessons have been learned from the debacle. Though there still remains a lingering reluctance to do anything to weaken the effort on which the country's hopes are centered, even those who suffered under the authoritarian regime and are good friends of the new one now in office have felt impelled to sound a note of warning, in the spirit of the old Russian proverb: "A yes-man is your enemy, but your friend will argue with you."

Here, then, is a sample. Let us listen to the voice of A.D. Gorwalla, a distinguished veteran of the Indian Civil Service, whose little journal *Opinion* was throughout the dark days perhaps the most courageous voice of dissent, writing on May 31, 1977.

One would like to support this government—if it would let one. It is the best government that has been in the country since independence. Its emergence marked the end of a period of un-

bridled tyranny and personal rule. It has quickly restored several of the freedoms the previous government had suppressed. But . . . But what? Its behavior has been unethical in several respects. It said it would not topple governments of other parties in the states. It actually has overthrown nine of them. It said it would not accept defectors. It has, in fact, accepted large numbers of them. It said it would not put up as candidates for election people of doubtful character or sullied reputation. Now, it seems among its lists there are quite a number of such. There are, it will be, and has been, argued, good reasons for all these aberrations. Constitutional lawyers and jurists have presented elaborate cases in favor of the courses adopted, justifying them amply. Some of them have, moreover, been initiated, and almost all of them supported, by the most important of the saviors of the nation, referred to above. Yet even despite such powerful backing, to simple minds like this writer's the objection remains: "You say one thing and you do the opposite. Is your word just pie-crust then, to be broken at the least provocation? Great sirs, you came in with a burst of moral fervor. Has that all evaporated so quickly? If so, we must judge you to be the usual politicians and assess you accordingly . . ."

This government, then, may be better than any other available, but it cannot be supported without reservation by men of principle. Each one of its acts must be examined on merits. It must be regarded with the same watchfulness and suspicion as was Mrs. Gandhi's before the Emergency, or her father's in the past decades. Whatever it says, it will not bring in the millennium. There is nothing so elementary as keeping your word. It is the first step in the creation of trust. This government has failed in that. The rest is . . . need we say it?

The *Statesman* and the *Indian Express* were the two national dailies who refused to bend and yet managed to survive. In a series of signed articles, the editor of the *Statesman*, S. Nihal Singh, felt impelled to make some gloomy observations.

What Janata is attempting is to take over wholesale the Congress legislators and their constituency following in the states. They

are being offered the chance of riding on the back of the Janata wave—assuming it has not abated—to return to the legislatures under a label. For Janata, it is a short-cut to acquiring power in the states because, despite the risks involved, the ruling party at the center is in a hurry to consolidate its hold on the country . . .

Meanwhile, it is ironical that in its attempt to consolidate power, Janata is increasingly taking on the attributes of the Congress Party . . .

If one were to close one's eyes and substitute Janata for the Congress, one would be back in the days of pre-1969 India. It is as if the eight years of Mrs. Gandhi's aberrations had not existed—she was feeling her way to power before engineering the split—and we were back in the comfortable days of Nehru's India with their familiar rhetoric, problems, and contradictions . . .

The scramble for Janata tickets is only too reminiscent of the old Congress ways. So are the charges and countercharges being levelled, the tradeoffs and the wheeling and dealing in progress. The change of government was not a revolution or otherwise, but merely a change of personalities and a reversion to the pre-Mrs. Gandhi values.

In the *Indian Express*, Kuldip Nayar, who is also the London *Times* correspondent and who was detained for a while in 1975 till he was released by the order of the Delhi High Court, seems to agree.

The sluggishness in taking decisions apart, there appears to be less effort to weigh decisions in the scales of values; there is more belief in the ends than the means. Opening the floodgates to defectors is only one example. The result is that all the unwanted and undesirable elements are now switching their loyalty to Janata overnight. The same sycophants and turncoats are beginning to surround the Janata leaders.

In an editorial on June 25, 1977, the *Express* wrote as follows.

Dissatisfaction in Janata ranks over the way the elections to the office of party leaders were conducted in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar

is deeper than is being recognized by the party high command in Delhi . . . There has been wheeling and dealing of a kind not very dissimilar to the practices in these matters to which Mrs. Gandhi had accustomed the Congress . . . The issue is of democracy in the functioning of the Janata Party. It was accepted by the Janata high command that the selection of the Chief Ministers was the business of the state legislative parties. As it turned out, the acceptance was only an academic acknowledgment of a healthy principle, and not an injunction laying down a code of behavior."

There is a sense of *déjà vu* about it all. One has constantly to remind oneself that one is not back in the days of Jawaharlal Nehru. The danger of reconciling oneself to the Congress regime, deodorized of the excesses of the past two years, is that it was Nehru's inadequacies and half-baked Marxist dogmas that opened the way to Indira Gandhi. And while history might not repeat itself in every detail, there is yet a danger of the wheel turning full circle once again. All this is not yet irreversible, and every effort must be made to help the new government to live up to the people's expectations.

But what of Jayaprakash, who made this liberation possible? Can he not keep those whom he has put in power on the straight and narrow path of virtue? Has JP used the politicians to rid India of Indira, or have the politicians used him to get into the seats of power? Can Jayaprakash continue to influence those in office without getting tarred with their brush in the eyes of the people? On March 24, in New Delhi, the constituents of the victorious Janata Party took a solemn pledge, underwritten by Jayaprakash's presence, to practice "austerity and honesty in personal and public life" and "to endeavor earnestly to fulfill the task that he (Gandhi) began." Will Jayaprakash be able to hold those concerned to that pledge?

Soon after the transfer of power in August 1947 from British to Indian hands, Nehru and Patel, installed in power, brushed aside Gandhi's advice and asked him to leave the country's administration to them. Can it be that Jayaprakash may one day have to share Gandhiji's experience?