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EAST & WEST

Letter from India

J.P.'s Testament

By M. R. Masani

JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN has now become one of the best publicised and most written-about Indians of the day. His prison diary has been published in book form, and every morning the newspaper reader in India is told of the state of his health. Quite rightly, he is given a greater share of the credit for the end of Mrs Indira Gandhi's authoritarian régime in March 1977 than any other individual. Millions in India pray for his good health as they believe he alone can keep the country and its new Government on the straight and narrow path of adherence to the values which he embodies.

And yet, not long ago, this was not so. From the time of his release from solitary confinement in November 1975 till the end of 1976, JP was a man most people feared to visit and the censored Indian Press dared not quote. His isolation from his friends abroad and the people of India was nearly complete even after his solitary detention had ended.

There is a dramatic incident, the story of which can now be told, regarding JP in the dark days of December 1975 when he was still fighting desperately for his life. It has remained known only to him and two or three of his intimates, and it recaptures the climate of those days.

I VISITED JP in the Post-Graduate Institute of Medicine in Chandigarh immediately after the news of his release on 13 November, and I returned to Bombay ahead of him to await his arrival in Jaslok Hospital for treatment.

When JP entered Jaslok Hospital on 22 November, he did so as a dying man. His kidneys, it was discovered, had practically stopped functioning altogether, and his condition was precarious. I called to see him next morning, 23 November, and made the following entry

MINOO MASANI's account of the career of Jayaprakash Narayan was published in ENCOUNTER, December 1975, with a postscript in January 1976.

(which I reproduce from the "Emergency Diary" I had been keeping from 26 June 1975):

"I may be wrong but I definitely have the feeling that he was a much weaker and frailer man than he was when I had seen him a few days earlier in Chandigarh. That, I suppose, is the contribution of the Prime Minister's Secretariat in delaying him in Delhi.

"When I was chatting with JP, Dr Shantilal Mehta, the head of Jaslok Hospital, turned up. He told JP that he and I had been in school together. He mentioned that he had already been attacked by the *Janmabhoomi* newspaper for not having issued a health bulletin about JP at the Government's insistence. Dr Shantilal was quite justifiably angry at this slur. When he asked JP what he should do, JP said he would leave things in the doctor's hands. When Dr Shantilal turned to me inquiringly, I suggested he might put out a tentative and not very communicative bulletin saying it would take a few days for JP's kidneys to be investigated and only then could any form of prognosis or diagnosis be made, but that JP's life was not in danger. To my surprise Dr Shantilal said that he was not in a position to say that JP's life was not in danger. I must confess I thought it was an unusual remark to make in the presence of the patient. It was obviously intended to make JP realise his condition. But Dr Shantilal did agree to my suggestion that he could tell the press that there was no immediate threat to his life and that they would put JP on an artificial kidney the next day. ..."

The next two weeks were anxious ones. Despite the dedicated attention of an entire battery of doctors, there did not appear to be much progress worth recording.

THE ANXIETY JP's friends experienced was heightened in my own mind by an awful thought. Suppose JP were suddenly to collapse, what was there to stop the Prime Minister and her colleagues rushing down to Bombay, becoming the principal mourners at the funeral, and claiming that JP had realised his errors and that he had intended to give the régime in Delhi his cooperation?

This was, let me hasten to say, not the result of a fevered imagination. That was what had in fact already happened to Mr Kamraj Nadar a couple of months earlier when he had passed away without leaving any written evidence of his attitude to public affairs.

Quite apart from the macabre nature of such a development, what bothered me was the way in which this could endanger JP's reputation for posterity and in history, and mar an entire lifetime's devoted service to human freedom.

After two or three days of perplexity, I decided to take JP into my confidence. On the morning of 4 December I ventured to share my fears with him, and suggested he put a few lines on paper in order to guard against his being misrepresented in case the worst were to happen. To my relief, JP nodded and said it was a sensible idea. He

French family on the tour look "like very cheap microscopes." Syracuse spreads across its countryside "in a smeary way." The white cusps of cyclamen push through the soil "like the ears of some fabulous story-book creature." This is the real thing, the touch of Durrell for which he will, in my opinion, always be remembered.

Would that it were all so. But *Sicilian Carousel* is a tired successor to so many pleasures. The great god Pan, it seems, has momentarily deserted Mr Durrell, and his pagan exuberance is muted. Even his elegance flags—"It didn't ought to be a great work of art but it was" is scarcely vintage Durrell—while the celebrated similes sometimes have an anxious air.

Is the long exile beginning to tell? Certainly the moments of English nostalgia are poignantly dated. London barmaids, I fear, no longer say "Lord luv yer now", still less as a general rule wear Horrocks cottons on holiday. The Eighth Army, the county cricket scores in *The Times*, a Waugh-like schoolmaster on the run, a comic Anglican Bishop, a jolly nice ex-Indian Army colonel—these extras and incidentals of the *mise-en-scène* ring a little melancholy, I think, like stanzas rescued from an old typescript, and dusted down to fit a more contemporary composition.

WHY? WELL PARTLY, I suspect, because Mr Durrell enjoyed neither making the journey nor writing the book. The first was a misjudgment gamely endured (besides, the Americans wanted some magazine articles), the second

a telling example, it seems to me, of enthusiasm congealing into duty. When Mr Durrell finished *this one*, I would bet my last advance, he opened a bottle of his delectable local muscat in sheer relief (even the Sicilian wine had been pretty awful). Every writer makes a mistake sometimes, and this was one of his.

Then there is the subject. Mr Durrell is a Hellenist, and in his previous Mediterranean writings, Corfu to Alexandria, he has been pursuing his own ideals of, or tastes in, Greekness. He tried to do the same in Sicily, and often succeeded, he assures us, in recapturing the authentic Attic tang, the wistful melody of grove or ruin, that has so long enthralled him. But Sicilian Greekness is, like it or not, residual. It may be, as Mr Durrell says, that there are pockets of Greek-speaking Sicilians still, but their culture has long been overwhelmed by waves of Romanness, Arabness, Normanness, Spanishness, and Italianity. Far more pungent than the Greekness of Sicily is its own mongrel ambience of power, intrigue, complexity and decay; but into these matters, by the nature of commercial tourism, the little red bus did not poke its bonnet.

Finally, it is a failure of form. As a travel book, it does not work. Mr Durrell needs time, affection, silence and long discourse to distil his magic. He needs to stand and stare. What possessed him to suppose that he could honour his art from the seat of a tourist bus on a week's tour of the antiquities? He remains, even on the evidence of this frail piece, one of the most delightful writers alive: so if, like me, you are saddened by *Sicilian Carousel*, don't blame the author—blame the *genre*.

The Avenue at Middelharnis, By Hobbema

Regard the perspective, the teacher said.
He was a man of precision, and in
his subject, mathematics, I bled
from incomprehension, frustrated chalk.
So—regard—the proper Word,
and my imagination walked
the long straight road in the Netherland sun.

He said it was flat; I knew it was flat.
The magic was in the maths and when
the road drew me into infinity, that
might have been my Damascus. He
taught me relevance, and I sat
in his class and learned nothing else—but have seen
worlds beyond Middelharnis since then.

Joan Downar

then went on to ask if I would prepare a draft for him. JP's habit of asking me to draft statements and resolutions for him was one I had known from the 1930s when we were co-secretaries of the Congress Socialist Party. I had—earlier that morning, rather anticipating such a request—prepared a short draft of what I imagined JP would like to say. So I produced it from my pocket. "Just like you", quipped JP happily. I asked him how he found the draft, and he said it was fine. When I asked if he would sign it right then as a "holding operation" until we could get the document better authenticated, JP did so but only after making a change which showed that he was by no means signing without applying his mind to it.

I did not then tell JP that I had decided we should move rather fast because that afternoon JP was going in for a biopsy of his kidneys; according to some, kidney biopsy could be fatal by giving a shock to the kidneys. Mercifully, though the biopsy was not a success, JP came out of it uninjured.

It was necessary that JP's political testament should be as properly attested and authenticated in order to withstand any challenge as would an ordinary Will made by any patient in hospital. I took the problem to my eminent lawyer friend, Soli Sorabjee, now Additional Solicitor-General to the Government of India. Soli was distinguishing himself by his advocacy of Editors, including myself, who were then refusing to bow to the whims of Mrs Gandhi's press censors. He promised to bring a Notary Public with him to JP's bedside.

On Friday, 5 December, at the appointed hour of 6.30 p.m., Soli Sorabjee turned up with a Notary Public, his clerk, his register and his seal, and we went through the formal signing and notarising of JP's political testament which read:

"Today is the 5th of December 1975 and I am undergoing treatment at the Jaslok Hospital in

Bombay for my kidneys which have been very badly damaged during the 4½ months of solitary confinement in detention from which I have just emerged.

"Just in case I am removed from the scene, I would like to state for the information of my friends in India and abroad and the Indian people in general that my views about the situation in India are precisely what they were on 25th June 1975 and when I wrote to the Prime Minister in July 1975. Indeed all the ugly things that have happened since have only confirmed my apprehensions. I am making this clear just in case there should be any attempt to misrepresent the position when I am no longer there to correct any such misstatements. I hope the people of India will be able before long to liberate themselves non-violently from the present tyranny."

WHEN I ARRIVED home I wrote in my diary: "I sincerely hope we won't have to use this document and that JP will be able to speak for himself in the coming months and years."

Such was the grim atmosphere and sense of insecurity in which we then functioned that we arranged for photostats of the Testament to be got out of the country to the *Times* and *Telegraph* in London and suitable confidantes in New York, to be used only in the event that it became necessary to do so.

Fortunately, there was no occasion for the Testament to be used; and from January 1977 onwards when freedom of association and of the Press was restored, JP was able to give his call for liberation to the people of India from the platform and through the Press.

Recently, I read his Testament of 5 December, 1975, back to JP and told him I thought it should now be published. He agreed. The document is now only of historical value; but it bears evidence to the unswerving determination and tenacity with which JP adhered to his objectives even when he was at the lowest ebb of his physical resources.

Red Indian Corpse

Deer-of-the-Waters: he laboured hard on his grammar
And learnt to say John Doe; his coat of arms of a deer
Went back to the Stone Age: the family mark,
The dodaim or totem which was his true father
And everyone's true father, since the pregnant women
Fed on venison, and this built his body; the red flesh
Of all his ancestors was this same totem venison.
Then they did the Italian Pope Trick on him:
Confessed him, shot him, and because his personal name
Had never been written, called him after the totem: Doe
Typed on a tag-label tied to his left big toe.

Peter Redgrove

PRESS

Last Chance for British Newspapers

Has Fleet Street a Future?—By NORA BELOFF



BRITISH NEWSPAPERS jointly own their two major news agencies: the Press Association and Reuters. If we want a plural and diversified press, they will have to learn to share their instruments of production.

The Royal Commission on the Press has just predicted that unless Fleet Street introduces "root and branch reforms" in the way they

produce their products, many newspapers will close. But it takes a highly pessimistic view about the industry's capacity to change. It speaks of the "suicidal behaviour" of the print unions, but concludes that nothing can be done about it. This gloom is certainly justified if most national newspapers go on, as at present, expending their energy and money trying to demolish their rivals—and so putting themselves at the mercy of any small group of employees strategically placed to prevent their particular paper from coming out. The Royal Commission lists among the special features of the national newspaper industry the fact that on the frequent occasions when a small group of dissatisfied or militant workers halts production, all the other workers have to be paid their full earnings—normally at least three times as high as the nationally negotiated wages.

Yet despite their hostility to each other, the newspaper proprietors see nothing odd about sharing their news services, even though different newspapers obviously use their news-tickers in wholly different ways. No paper, however eager to encourage its own reporters and foreign correspondents, would be able to dispense with the national and international network of agency messages. Basic coverage of world news would be crushingly expensive and no single enterprise could afford it. Until now, however, anyone

wishing to publish a newspaper (or group of papers) had to provide the plant. A revolution in the system of conveying news has made this obsolete.

IN THE 16TH CENTURY, the human effort required for disseminating words was suddenly geometrically reduced when Caxton introduced the printing press. And in 1884 the invention of the linotype machine by Ottmar Mergenthaler along with other printing developments enabled newspapers to publish millions of copies.

According to Lord Barnetson, chairman of United Newspapers, the new electronic methods of communication and publishing represent a leap of similar proportions. The relevance of this new technology to the plight of Britain's newspapers was examined for the Royal Commission by Rex Winsbury (of the *Financial Times*). By drastically reducing the costs of production, he reported, the new methods "offer to British society at least the hope of preserving and perhaps even enlarging what many other countries have either lost or never had—a varied and powerful national press to complement the financially more viable regional and local press of this country."

Winsbury travelled extensively in the United States and described the differences between the old system and the new. The linotype machine on which British national newspapers are still published is a large, clumsy looking typesetting contraption, with mechanical arms, cases of matrices (moulds), and a keyboard. When the operator hits the key, a matrix for the corresponding letter ejects from the case and falls into place. The operator inserts spaces so that the type reaches the end of the line, using a hyphen if the words do not fit. He then releases a line of type by pushing a lever that causes hot molten lead to be injected into the matrices. The columns of type are afterwards fitted into a frame and provide a reverse version of the newspaper page as it will come off the press.