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July 3, 1975

To
The Editor

For arch

Dear Friend:

I had the privilege of being closely associated for over fifty years with Indian press and politics both during the struggle for freedom and after freedom. I know that you will not be able to publish this letter but I felt that you may be interested to know my reactions to the present crisis in India.

I feel that Democracy, freedom of the Press, Rule of Law and Individual liberty are all in deadly peril today. It is true that the continuation of the proclamation of Emergency of 1971, long after any threat from outside had disappeared, undermined their position even before the second proclamation of June 26, 1975. The fact that the leaders were arrested under M.I.S.A. and not under the second proclamation shows that the latter was meant to dramatise (i) the censorship of the press; (ii) suspension of fundamental rights including denial to a person under detention any resort to court; and (iii) empowering executive officials to detain persons without giving any reason. The total effect of the two proclamations and the orders issued under them is that India is today under as complete a dictatorship as any totalitarian country in the world. It may be said that this is only temporary and Parliament will have to endorse the second proclamation within two months. With prominent opposition leaders in jail and the overwhelming majority of members belonging to the Ruling Congress Party, this will be at best a formality as Members of the Ruling Congress Party, except a few, have not shown any concern for the great ideals for which they fought during the struggle for freedom. Press censorship may be extended even to the proceedings in Parliament and State Legislatures.

Of all the issues in peril, I feel that the total censorship of the Press is the greatest danger to the present and the future. It is not only fair comment that is prevented but there is also a total black out of all news relating to those who have been detained, their health and their treatment, as well as news about meetings and other forms of dissent. In due course even reports of acute economic scarcity will come under the ban and suffering people forced to swallow false claims of economic improvement. Such a total darkness has not been known even under British Imperialism and this is bound to produce in a short time crops

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of rumours which will demoralise the life of the people as a whole. Few people will give any credence to the official news which is published and there should be no surprise if the circulation of newspapers is seriously affected.

I fully realise the helplessness of an Editor if he has to think and act in isolation. But, I cannot believe that if all or most of the Editors of the Indian Press can meet and protest strongly at the uncalled for, unparelled and iniquitous censorship, it will have no effect.

It is obvious that the government is exploiting the censorship to obtain maximum publicity for the Ruling Congress organisation, Ruling Congress governments and the leaders of the Ruling Congress. It will not be unfair for Indian newspapers to refuse to oblige them. Official news which is of importance to the people has to be published even if it is one-sided. But there is no need to publicise support to emergency or print parrot-praises of the Prime Minister.

I am afraid that the people in power may come to the conclusion that the Indian press can be completely controlled indefinitely and reduced to the role of mere organs for printing press-communiques.

It should be possible to find ways and means by which, even within the limitations of censorship much valuable political education can be given to the people. I suggest that every paper should get lawyers, retired judges and others to analyse the implications of the Emergency Chapter of the Indian Constitution and make suggestions to amend the articles so that the freedom of the press, freedom from arrest or detention except by the order of a magistrate and according to law, right to resort to courts and full exercise of fundamental rights will be assured in all circumstances and at all times. The people should be educated to realise that this is the greatest issue before the country.

Yours sincerely,

K. Santhanam

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