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Dear Friend:

Those who foresaw a general election before March 1977, those who eagerly hoped for it, wishfully interpreting in the direction they desired every word that fell from the lips of the Delhi Mighty, forgot the Aristotelian maxim: Tyranny has no regard to any public action that does not also serve the tyrant's own advantage.

Our Indian tyrant, Indira Gandhi, is too perspicacious a person not to have seen that while elections now might bring her grief, perhaps more grief than she could bear, they would certainly not bring her joy, at any rate more joy than is hers at present. Elections might diminish her power, they could not increase it. Today she is at its pinnacle, with Parliament itself, at her word, legalizing her tyranny, turning it into the permanent law of the land, while her young son, whom she is grooming to be her heir, goes round the country receiving homage, lording it over Chief Ministers, Presidents of Congress Committees and business tycoons.

Today in India Indira's slightest gesture has paramount significance. At her nod, six policemen in jeeps sweep down on a grey-haired lady in her sixties, an eminent scholar of great integrity, President of a state writers' association, as she sits working at her desk in a library, and carry her off to jail. Her crime? Who knows? Her remedy? Who knows? Very probably none, since arrests and imprisonment under MISA are now non-justiciable, and in any case, the Courts have by and large become in Bacon's phrase "Lions under the throne". Indira's right to imprison a person, high or low, for reasons of state, which she need not give and which no court can go into or even seek to learn, is no longer denied. All of us, citizens of India, are now not free as of right; no, if we still harbour the illusion of freedom, it is by her pleasure, and by her pleasure alone. Every person's liberty, every person's life, every person's property is subject to her will. Good it is to see things as they are, even if that disturbs the peace of mind of the leaders in every field who stride along with heads held high, complacent in their now-illusory authority; of the ordinary citizen who goes about as he used to thinking himself to be free as in the past. Freedom is dead; sing its dirge if you will, but do not pretend to comfort yourselves and others that it is still alive, that in fact under the very patronage of the tyrant herself, it will be seen again in full flower. As the ancients had it, Tyranny is an ample and pleasant estate but there are no easy and smooth paths down from it.

Some there be who seeing the Elections put off again, conclude that the Indian polity is at the crossroads. Now is the time for it to choose which road to take, that to freedom or that to authoritarianism. But what is the polity, or rather who? Why Indira Gandhi. To the disgrace of all Indians it must be admitted that she is the one crucial element in the Indian polity, and there is no other. Is there any probability of her taking the road to freedom, in other words will she voluntarily dethrone herself? Her principal, indeed her sole passion has for many years been the possession of total power and the full enjoyment of it. (The Shape Of Things To Come, August 11, 1970) Now having come very near to fulfilling it wholly, is she going to turn around completely? Good sirs, the crossroads are far behind us. We passed them on June 25, 1975, with the imposition of the Emergency, and every day since then has taken us further along the despotic way.

Yes, yes, say some, but why the comparative absence of rigor as in other dictatorships, that of the Soviet Union or Communist China? You do not think it is rigor enough to alter the laws to take away all the rights of free men! Well you may be right, I agree that we have not heard of any pogroms or mass killings. But ~~were~~ they necessary? Consider the nature of our people as compared with the savage bears of the North or the fierce wolves of the East and North-East. The duly-elected government of a state can be overturned by a mere ukase from Delhi and none of the electors will do anything. You do not need rigor for dealing with such people. Consider also the advantage to the dictator from avoiding extremes. So long as her actions have the appearance of being moderate and the color of law (law, however, altered for the worse but still in form, law) she can be sure the regulatory forces of the state (her ultimate sanctions) will not turn against her. Consider too the constant barrage of propaganda, mostly untrue but nonetheless effective on that account, in the denial of any criticism due to the very thorough and full censorship of the Press and cinema and complete ownership of radio and television. Think also of the lure of the immense patronage in cash and kind at her disposal, the fear of the countrywide dossiers she possesses. She truly knows human follies and crimes as the back of her hand, and acts upon her knowledge of them with promptness and decision, when she thinks it necessary in her own interest. But do not be under any illusion about her. She too could act at least like Khrushchev, - if not Stalin or Mao - whose arms were red to the elbow with the blood of the Ukrainians (Soviet citizens) when he worked under Stalin.

What then do we do, we the comparatively few who still cherish freedom, who cannot give up the vision of a free Indian people, living freely as their forefathers never did in historical memory except for the brief period from 1947 to 1975, managing their own affairs themselves, free of dictators, self-seeking and tyrannical, or even on occasion, benevolent? In our circumstances, with no other means possible, there can be only one answer, Dogged, Determined, Dissent. For the opposition politicians, this means the formation of a single Party with but a single aim, Freedom, and the taking of all measures to frustrate the dictator who has destroyed freedom and proposes, under plausible guises, to stamp out its embers. For ordinary citizens, it involves examining the dictator's statements and actions with insight and reserve, refusing to accept the lies poured out, refusing to take any part in her activities or to go to her meetings and those of her myrmidons, developing an attitude of healthy scepticism, and maintaining in one's own mind and heart the spirit of freedom. Whether any worthwhile results will follow externally I do not know; but I do know that for true women and men, for real Indians, nothing else makes any sense. The issue is simple, Slavery or Freedom.

Yours sincerely,

Indira Gandhi