

40 C Ridge Road
Bombay 400 006

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Dear Friend,

Unfortunate the land that has an arrant liar at the head of its obsequious administration! The atmosphere of government is then irretrievably vitiated; the men engaged in its tasks see things not as they are but as the chief has made them appear in his lies. A haziness shadows all eyes, and decisions can scarcely be on merits.

The ordinary liar is almost invariably aware that he is lying, and that the truth is otherwise. The arrant liar gets so carried away that for him there is no distinction between the fact and his fancy. After a few repetitions he believes his lie to be true, and anybody who states the truth opposed to his lie becomes to him an enemy to be crushed.

Consider these most recent examples of the arrant lie (Indian Express, 18.8.76), "Prime Minister Gandhi told the Indian community living in Sri Lanka that the emergency in India had now been considerably relaxed and it is no longer the same rigid one of the type when it was imposed." But people in India are still being jailed without trial and even without cause given. The fundamental freedoms are as curtailed as ever. Except in the Prime Minister's mind there is no relaxation. She having fancied that there has been relaxation, believes it firmly to be fact. So for her there has been relaxation and she has no hesitation in stating it.

"Mrs. Gandhi said there was no Press censorship now and even the guidelines to the Press had been 'greatly' relaxed. This, when at least one journal has been forcibly closed down by order of Government for not submitting to pre-censorship, and when a leading daily newspaper has not been able to appear for several days owing to pre-censorship difficulties! Anyone who has any access to any editorial office knows how false the statement is. Yet Mrs. Gandhi makes it with perfect aplomb.

"She added most of the people who had been taken into custody when the emergency was imposed had been released." In fact, most of those arrested are still in jail, though fourteen months have passed. Time and again has government been asked to give the figures of the people arrested. Time and again it has chosen not to do so. Recently the Home Minister took refuge in a round-about formula which would mean that only about fourteen thousand had been detained! Independent sources put the figure at between one lakh twenty thousand and two lakhs.

"The question facing India today was how to make the people responsible to the nation without forcing them to do so, Mrs. Gandhi said." Is the nation then something apart from the people? Is it an abstract concept like the dictatorship of the proletariat meaning a dictatorship over the proletariat by those who have seized power? In our view the people and the nation are one and there is no national interest other than the people's interest. Those who seek to differentiate between the two would seem to be serving some end of their own; arrogating to themselves the right to speak for, to manipulate, to wield power, in the name of the nation, over the people, the mass of Indians who constitute the entity India. Such individuals and groups are in fact authoritarian, as appears quite clearly from the use of the word 'forcing' above.

Democrats do not force the people to do things. They reason with them, they persuade them, and in the Indian context, they very often succeed. Not a single measure for the people's good put forward by the government have the people opposed in the years since Independence. The defaults that there have been, have been by the government for reasons of its own. Nor again has the Government, when governing according to the law, been prevented from exercising its authority by the people. If for its own purpose in order to create an atmosphere and impression of crisis, it chooses deliberately not to use remedies lawfully within its power, it surely is not for it to complain about the people's behaviour and attitude, to proclaim Emergency and use of extraordinary measures against the people.

The real question facing India today would thus seem to be not the most mendacious one posed by Mrs. Gandhi, but how to make the Government responsible to the people. That at the present time it is not, that we, the Indian people, are living under a dictatorship, are the victims of authoritarian rule, is quite clear to all who have eyes to see, ears to hear and minds to think. Even Indians whose interests make them compromise or who are professional defenders of the Government, find it difficult to argue otherwise, and not unoften, seek refuge in attacking our system of democratic government. They say "Ah, that's the villain, it's not the people, oh no, but the system, so difficult to work with so many of our people so poor and illiterate. No, no, let's have another that reduces the strain and burden on them, cuts down their rights, imposes on them duties, gives much more power to the Government - bound to be wise and understanding, of course - is in fact authoritarian without bearing that abhorred name."

That is the danger we face, dear friend. May you perceive it, and not just intellectually! As old John Barbour sang in the fifteenth century for people most of whom were also poor and illiterate:

A! Fredome is a noble thing!
Fredome maye man to hoiff liking,
Fredome ell solece to man giffis,
He levys at ese that frely lives.

Yours sincerely,

W. G. A. S. S. S.