

6/09

Dear Prime Minister,

I am appalled at press reports of your speeches and interviews. (The very fact that you have to say something everyday to justify your action implies a guilty conscience). Having muzzled the press and every kind of public dissent, you continue with your distortions and untruth ~~mixer~~ without fear of criticism or contradiction. If you think that in this way you will be able to justify yourself in the public eye and damn the Opposition to political perdition, you are sorely mistaken. If you doubt this, you may test it by revoking the emergency, restoring to the people their fundamental rights, restoring the freedom of the press, releasing all those whom you have imprisoned or detained for no other ~~crime~~ ^{crime} than performing their patriotic duty. Nine years, Madam, is not a short period of time for the people, who are gifted with a sixth sense, to have found you out.

The burden of your song, as I have been able to discover, is that (a) ^{there} ~~there~~ was a plan to paralyse the government, (b) that one person had been trying to spread disaffection among the ranks of the civil and military forces. These seem to be your major notes. But there have been also minor notes. Every now and then you have been doling out your obiter dicta, such as the nation being more important than democracy and about the suitability of social democracy to India, and more in the same vein.

As I am the villain of the piece, let me put the record straight. ~~There was no such plan and you knew it. But we state the facts.~~
This may be of no interest to you — for all your distortion and untruth are wilful and deliberate — but at least the truth would have been recorded.

About the plan to paralyse the government. There was no such plan and you know it. Let me state the facts.

Of all the States of India it was in Bihar alone where there was a people's movement. But there too, according to the Chief Minister's many statements, it had fizzled out long ago, if it had ever existed. But the truth is— and you should know if your ubiquitous Intelligence has served you right— that it was spreading and percolating deep down in the countryside. Until the time of my arrest "janata Sarkars" were being formed from the village upwards to the Block level. Later on, the process was to be taken up, hopefully, to the district and State level.

If you have cared to look into the programme of the ~~jan~~ janata sarkars, you would have found that for the most part it was constructive, such as: regulating the public distribution system, checking corruption at the lower levels of administration, implementing the land reform laws, settling disputes through the age-old custom of conciliation and arbitration, assuring fair deal to harijans, curbing such social evils as tilak and dahej, etc. There was nothing in all this that by any stretch of the imagination could be called subversive. Only where the Janata sarkars were solidly organised that such programmes as non-payment of taxes were taken up. At the peak of the movement in urban areas an attempt was made for some days, through dharna and picketing, to stop the working of government offices. At Patna whenever the Assembly opened attempts were made to persuade the Members to resign and to prevent them peacefully from going in. All these were calculated ~~in~~ programmes of civil disobedience, and thousands of men and women were arrested all over the State.

If all this adds up to an attempt to paralyse the Bihar government, well, it was the same kind of attempt as was made during the freedom struggle through non-cooperation and satyagraha to paralyse the British government. But that was a government established by force, whereas the Bihar government and legislature are both constitutionally established bodies. What right has anyone to ask an elected government and elected legislature to go? This is one of your favourite questions. But it has been answered umpteen times by competent persons, including well-known constitutional lawyers. The answer is that in a democracy the people do have the right to ask for the resignation of an elected government if it has gone corrupt and has been misruling. And if there is a legislature that persists in supporting such a government it too must go, so that the people might choose better representatives.

But in that case how can it be determined what the people want? In the usual democratic manner. In the case of Bihar, the mammoth rallies and processions held in Patna, the thousands of constituency meetings held all over the State, the three-days' Bihar bandh, the memorable happenings of the 4th of November and the "largest ever" meeting held at the Gandhi maidan on November 12 were a convincing measure of the people's will. And what had the Bihar government and Congress to show on their side? The miserable counter-offensive of November 16, which had been master-minded by Shri Barooah and on which, according to reliable reports, the fantastic sum of 60 lakhs of rupees were spent. But if that was not conclusive enough proof, I had asked repeatedly for a plebiscite. But you were afraid to face the people.

While I am on the Bihar movement, let me mention another important point that would illumine the politics of such a type of

Movement. The students of Bihar did not start their movement just off the bat as it were. After formulating their demands at a conference they had met the Chief Minister and the Education Minister. They had had several meetings. But unfortunately the inept and corrupt Bihar government did not take the students seriously. Then the latter gheraoed the Assembly. The sad events of that day precipitated the Bihar movement. Even then the students did not demand the resignation of the Ministry nor the dissolution of the Assembly. It was after several weeks during which firing, lathi charges and indiscriminate arrests took place, that the Students' Action Committee felt compelled to put up that demand. It was at that point that the Rubicon was crossed.

Thus in Bihar, the government was given a chance to settle the issues across the table. None of the demands of the students was unreasonable or non-negotiable. But the Bihar government preferred the method of struggle, i.e., unparalleled repression. It was the same in U.P. In either case the government rejected the path of negotiation, of trying to settle the issues across the table, and chose the path of strife. Had it been otherwise, there would have been no movement at all.

I have pondered over this riddle: why did not those governments act wisely? The conclusion I have arrived at is that the main burdle has been corruption. Somehow the governments have been unable to deal with corruption in their ranks, particularly at the top level: the Ministerial level itself. And corruption has been the central point of the movement, particularly corruption in the government and the administration.

Be that as it may, except for Bihar there was no movement of its kind in any other State of India. In U.P. though satyagraha had started in April, it was far from becoming a people's movement. In some other States though struggle committees had been formed, there seemed to be no possibility of a mass movement anywhere. And as the general election to the Lok Sabha was drawing near, the attention of the Opposition parties was turned more towards the coming electoral struggle than to any struggle involving civil disobedience.

Thus, the plan of which you speak, the plan to paralyse the government, is a figment of your imagination thought up to justify your totalitarian measures.

But suppose I grant you for a minute, for argument's sake, that there was such a plan, do you honestly believe that your erstwhile colleague, the former Deputy Prime Minister of India, and Chandra Shekhar, a member of the Congress Working Committee, were also a party to it? Then why have they also been arrested and many others like them?

No, dear Prime Minister, there was no plan to paralyse the government. If there was any plan, it was a simple, innocent and short-time plan to continue until the Supreme Court decided your appeal. It was this plan that was announced at the Ramila ground by Wamanji Deshmukh on the 26th June and which was the subject matter of my speech that evening. The programme was for a selected number of persons to offer satyagraha before or near your residence in support of the demand that you should step down until the Supreme Court's judgment on your appeal. The programme was to continue for seven days in Delhi, after which it was to be taken up in the States. And, as I have said above, it was to last only until the judgment of the Supreme Court. I do not see what is subversive or

dangerous about it. In a democracy the citizen has an inalienable right to civil disobedience when he finds that other channels of redress or reform have dried up. It goes without saying that the satyagrahi willingly invites and accepts his lawful punishment. This is the new dimension added to democracy by Gandhi. What an irony that it should be obliterated in Gandhi's own India!

It should be noted— and it is a very important point— that even this ^{anna} ~~progress~~ of satyagraha would not have occurred to the Opposition had you remained content with quietly clinging on to your office. But you did not do it. Through your henchmen you had rallies and demonstrations organised in front of your residence begging you not to resign. You addressed these rallies and justifying your stand advanced spurious arguments and heaped calumny on the head of the Opposition. An effigy of the High Court Judge was burnt before your residence and posters appeared in the city suggesting some kind of link between the judge and the C.I.A. When such despicable happenings were taking place every day, the Opposition had no alternative but to counteract the mischief. And how did it decide to do it? Not by rowdiness but by orderly satyagraha, self-sacrifice.

It was this "plan" and not any imaginary plan to paralyse the government that has aroused your ire and cost the people their liberties and dealt a death-blow to their democracy.

And why has the freedom of the press been suppressed? Not because the Indian press was irresponsible, dishonest or anti-government. In fact, nowhere, under conditions of freedom, is the press more responsible, reasonable and fair than it has been in India. The truth is that your anger against it was aroused because on the question of your resignation, after the High Court's judgment,

some of the papers took a line that was highly unpalatable to you. And when on the morrow of the Supreme Court judgment all the metropolitan papers, including the wavering Times of India, came out with well-reasoned and forceful editorials advising you to quit, freedom of the press became too much for you to stomach. That cooked the goose of the Indian press, and you struck your deadly blow. It staggers one's imagination to think that so valuable a freedom as freedom of the press, the very life-breath of democracy, can be snuffed out because of the personal pique of a Prime Minister.

You have accused the Opposition of trying to lower the prestige and position of the country's Prime Minister. But in reality the boot is on the other leg. No one has done more to lower the position and prestige of that great office than yourself. Can one ever think of the Prime Minister of a democratic country who cannot even vote in his parliament because he has been found guilty of corrupt electoral practices? (The Supreme Court may reverse the High Court's judgment— most probably it will be in this atmosphere of terror— but as long as that is not done your guilt and your deprivation of your right to vote remain).

As for the "one person" who is supposed to have tried to sow disaffection in the armed and police forces, he denies the charge. All that he has done is to make the men and officers of the Forces conscious of their duties and responsibilities. Whatever he has said in that connection is within the law: the Constitution, the Army Act and the Police Act.

So much for your major points: the plan to paralyse the government and the attempt to sow disaffection in the armed and police forces. Now a few of your minor points and obiter dicta.

You are reported to have said that democracy is not more

important than the nation. Are you not presuming too much, Madam Prime Minister? You are not the only one who cares for the nation. Among those whom you have detained or imprisoned there are many who have done much more for the nation than you. And everyone of them is as good a patriot as yourself. So, please do not apply salt to our wounds by lecturing to us about the nation.

Moreover, it is ^a false choice that you have formulated. There is no choice between democracy and the nation. It was for the good of the nation that the people of India declared in their Constituent Assembly on the 26th November, 1949, that "We the people of India having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Democratic Republic give to ourselves this Constitution". That democratic Constitution cannot be changed into a totalitarian one by a mere ordinance or a law of Parliament. That can be done only by the people of India themselves in their new Constituent Assembly, especially elected for that specific purpose. If *Justice*, liberty, Equality and Fraternity have not been rendered to "all its citizens" even after a quarter of a century of signing of that Constitution, the fault is not that of the Constitution or of democracy but of the Congress party that has been in power in Delhi all these years. It is precisely because of that failure that there is so much unrest among the people and the youth. Repression is no remedy for that. On the other hand, it only compounds the failure.

I, no doubt, see that the papers are full these days of reports of new policies, new drives, show of new enthusiasm. Apparently you are trying to make ^{up} for lost time, that is to say, you are making a show of doing here and now what you failed to do in nine years. But your twenty points will go the same way as your

ten points did and the "stray thoughts". But I assure you this time the people will not be fooled. And I assure you of another thing too: a party of self-seekers and spineless opportunists and jee-huzura such as the Congress, alas, has become can never do anything worthwhile. (Not all Congressmen are such. There are quite a few exceptions, such as those who have been deprived of their party membership and some of them their freedom. So that according to the dharma of totalitarianism, there could be no criticism even within the party.). There will be a lot of propaganda and make-ado on paper but on the ground level the situation will not change the least. The condition of the poor — and they are the great majority over the greater part of the country— has been worsening over the past years. It would be enough if the downward trend were arrested. But for that your whole approach to politics and economics will have to change.

I have written the above in utter frankness without mincing words. I have done so not out of anger or so as to get even with you in words. No, that would be a show of ~~weak~~ impotence. Nor does it show any lack of appreciation for the care that is being taken of my health. I have done it only to place the naked truth before you, which you have been trying to cover up and distort.

Having performed this unpleasant duty, may I conclude with a few parting words of advice? You know I am an old man. My life's work is done. And after Prabha's going I have nothing and no one to live for. My brother and nephew have their family and my younger sister—the elder died years ago— has her sons and daughters. I have ~~give~~ given all my life, after finishing education, to the country and asked for nothing in return. So, I shall be content to die a prisoner under your regime.

Would you listen to the advice of such a man? Please do not destroy the foundations on which the Father of the Nation, including your noble father, had laid down. There is nothing but strife and suffering along the path that you have taken. You inherited a great tradition, noble values and a working democracy. Do not leave behind a miserable wreck of all that. It would take a long time to put all that together again. For it would be put together again, I have no doubt. A people who fought British imperialism and humbled it cannot accept indefinitely the indignity and shame of totalitarianism. The spirit of man can never be vanquished, no matter how deeply suppressed. In establishing your personal dictatorship you have buried it deep. But it will rise from the grave. Even in Russia it is slowly coming up.

You have talked of social democracy. What a beautiful image those words call to the mind. But you have seen in eastern and central Europe how ugly is the reality. Naked dictatorship and in the ultimate analysis Russian overlordship. Please, please do not push India toward that terrible fate.

And may I ask to what purpose all these draconian measures? In order to be able to carry out your twenty points? But who was preventing you from carrying out the ten points? All the discontent, the protest, the satyagraha were due precisely to the fact that you were not doing anything to implement your programme, inadequate as it was, to lighten the misery and burden under which the people and youth were groaning. This is what Chandra Shekhar, Mohan Dharis, Krishna Kant and their friends have been saying for which they have been punished.

You have talked of "drift" in the country. But was that ~~due~~ due to the Opposition or to me? The drift was because of your lack of decision, direction and drive. You seem to act swiftly and dramatically only when your personal position is threatened. Once that is assured, the drift begins. Dear Indiraji, please do not identify yourself with the nation. You are not immortal, India is.

You have accused the Opposition and me of every kind of villainy. But let me assure you that if you do the right things, for instance, your 20 points, tackling corruption at Ministerial levels, electoral reforms, etc., take the Opposition into confidence, heed its advice, you will receive the willing cooperation of every one of us. For that you need not destroy democracy. The ball is in your court. It is for you to decide.

With these parting words, let me bid you farewell. May God be with you.

Sd/- Jayaprakash.

*This is a true copy of the letter I
wrote to ~~you~~ the Prime Minister
from Chandigarh in July 1975*

*J.P. Narayan
5.12.1975*