

# INDIRA SP CONFRONTATION THE GREAT DEBATE

R K Karanjia

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# INDIRA-JP CONFRONTATION

The Great Debate

**R K Karanjia**

Foreword by

**D K Borooah**

*President*

Indian National Congress



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## *Foreword*

**I**t is always a pleasure to read Mr R K Karanjia with his inimitable no-nonsense style. This book “Indira-JP Confrontation” is of a different genre, a kind of revelation borne of his own personal experience, both exciting and traumatic.

In a way, it was Mr Karanjia who pulled Mr Jayaprakash Narayan out of his political oblivion with an open letter (published in *Blitz*), prodding him to launch a crusade against corruption in public life. JP’s response was prompt. This was at the close of 1973. Since then a lot of things have happened in India climaxing with the proclamation of the state of national emergency.

This is the theme of his book. As a perceptive observer of the national scene, Mr Karanjia genuinely believed at the outset that what he calls an “Indira-JP axis” was all for our good, and in the interest of the country. He, therefore, cast himself in the role of a purohit ready to marry what he describes JP’s sense of morality to Indira’s statesmanship. He did not give up easily as is evident from his observation that Bihar imbroglio of JP was “a tragedy of good intentions.”

But then it happened. The bandwagon politics. The grand alliance becoming grander. JP’s passionate defence of the RSS, which he himself had condemned for Gandhiji’s assassination. His call to the armed forces to revolt against established authority. Mr Karanjia sums up : JP is “a lost leader” to him and thousands of others who had “stupendous faith in his moral if not political stature.”

“Indira-JP Confrontation” is a testament of disillusionment of eminent journalists like Mr Karanjia. I would heartily

commend this book. While some may disagree with his views, everybody who has watched his bright career in journalism, knows that Mr Karanjia has the courage to accept the realities of our national life even if they run counter to his ideas.

New Delhi  
November 7, 1975

**D K Borooah**  
*President*  
Indian National Congress

## *Preface*

*Blitz* Newsmagazine and I unconsciously made history and added an exciting new chapter to the traumas and troubles of India when we pulled Jayaprakash Narayan out of the political wilderness into which he had retired with an Open Letter inviting him to launch a National Forum Against Corruption with an Ombudsman-type quasi-judicial body to investigate corruption charges against ministers, officials and public men.

This invitation, which appeared in *Blitz* of December 22, 1973, evoked a positive and sympathetic reply from JP on January 19, 1974. We naturally welcomed it as an Olympian intervention against our corrupt society ; and so did the public in probably the largest readers' mail we received on the subject. To our knowledge, more than one former Chief Justice of either the Supreme Court or the High Courts, also, welcomed the proposal and offered their services, to the projected quasi-judicial commission. They counted, however, without their host. No sooner had JP accepted the invitation to public life than politicians and political parties got round him to persuade him to join the same shoddy game of corrupt power-politics which he had earlier denounced.

Thus, political corruption succeeded in seducing the Great Incorruptible himself ; and JP did not take long to assume the role of the tragic hero of Bihar, which, probably, is the most backward state in India. Just as Bihar politics cannot be divorced from those of India, so also the "total revolution" launched by JP against the ruling group of Bihar had to cross the borders of this wretched State to spread over the whole country.

JP's second major miscalculation, in our opinion, was his acceptance of the Prime Minister's challenge to fight the Cong-

ress Party on the national battlefield. JP fell into this booby-trap and thereby sacrificed his lofty, principled stand on a clean, partyless democracy to the dirty old game of party-politics.

The defeated and discredited "Grand Alliance", notorious as the "*Indira Hatao*" alliance, took advantage of this situation to jump on to JP's bandwagon, which, by the time it had moved from Bihar to distant Gujarat, had earned for itself and justified the Prime Minister's derisive comment that the "total revolution" consisted of "just two hollow words, 'total' and 'revolution', without any content, with a motley crowd of political parties with different objectives."

This is the bare, unvarnished outline of one of the most traumatic experience of Indian politics since independence in which *Blitz* played the leading role by keeping a non-aligned equi-distance between Indira Gandhi and Jayaprakash, till the latter's political aberrations as well as alliances with some of the most corrupt elements in the country forced us to take sides.

Not that the Government and the ruling party are blameless. Far from it. It was their corruption which prompted us to invite JP to set right their wrongs by heading a national forum against corruption. It was here that JP proved himself, once again, the congenial non-starter, leaving us with no alternative except to plump for the Indira Gandhi Congress and Government as the preferable alternative.

I need not say more. The following pages unfold this extraordinary drama as *Blitz* saw and reported it. The reader alone can judge the merits and demerits of either side at a time when he will soon be called upon to decide the issues at stake in the forthcoming general elections. □



## ***Introduction : Lost Revolution***

**O**n the hot, dusty morning of May 27, 1973, Mr Kedar Pande, then Chief Minister of Bihar, returned to Patna after a short visit to New Delhi. He drove from the airport directly to Raj Bhavan for a brief talk with Bihar Governor R D Bhandare. By evening the town was agog with rumours that he was determined to sack seven of his colleagues, all supporters of the late Union Railway Minister L N Mishra. They had been a thorn in his side.

Mr Pande felt confident and strong. He was the tenth Chief Minister of Bihar since the unfortunate General Elections of 1967. He had been picked by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi after days of indecision during which the wrangling, caste-ridden Bihar Congress Legislature Party could not agree on anyone as its leader. The 14 months during which he had tried to run the State's administration were among the most troubled in his life. Alarums and excursions there had been in plenty. Ministers had come and gone. The Cabinet had been expanded and contracted. There had been constant rebellion within the ranks and threats of open revolt. But he had survived. He felt he could face one more battle and survive.

That was the experience of all Bihar. For people and Government, it was a constant battle for survival. Bihar had acquired the reputation of being "the most corrupt, backward and apathetic State" in the Union. Not that the rest of India was a land of peace flowing with milk and honey. The era of post-freedom enthusiasm had lasted barely ten years. Since 1957, the nation had been facing crisis after crisis. As the grim picture of rising population and deepening poverty began to make its inexorable impact on the popular mind, and as the ranks of the charismatic leaders who had been thrown up in the battle for freedom, began to thin, a feeling near to despair was getting its grip on the people.

Bihar, a State 67,196 square miles in area, is among the most demoralised. The 1971 census had revealed that with 88.29 million people, it was the second most populous State. It had density of 324 per square kilometres as against the national average of 182. A National Sample Survey conducted as early as 1963-64 had revealed that assuming the exceedingly low per capita consumption of Rs 15 in rural and Rs 20 in urban areas as the poverty line, 35.3 per cent of Bihar's people lived below this line. This, in a highly industrialised State, holding our richest coal and steel belt, with our biggest industrial plants located at Jamshedpur, Ranchi and Bokaro, and having in the D.V.C. a high potential power project.

There were other and grimmer indications of Bihar's backwardness. India's poor are prone to perish of cold in winter and heat in summer, and to die of flood or famine. But Bihar's disaster budget was always cast on a larger scale. It had earned the unenviable sobriquet of being a "Calamity State." In the unprecedented heat spell that hit North India in 1972, the biggest toll of 537 lives was from Bihar; the figure for the rest of the country was just over 200. The next winter, 176 people died of cold. Even in the cold spell last December, 185 people died in the State. Last August the floods that hit the State in the midst of the Jayaprakash Narayan-led Movement affected seven million people, and although the loss of life was small (only six confirmed) more than 103,000 houses were damaged and crop losses were estimated by the Government at Rs 71 crores. A hundred Government offices engulfed by the floods were closed more effectively than by the volunteers of the Sangharsha Samities. This year the flood was the worst in living memory. Even the ministers were marooned in the bungalows. Patna was cut off from the rest of India for days and had to aerially fed.

The State appears to be more disaster prone than any other. Illustratively, when a hailstorm hit the Monghyr district on May 22, 1968, 20 people lost their lives and 85 were injured. On August 7, the same year, a country boat carrying workers was caught in the swollen Ganga at Narain Ghat and 50 were drowned. Earlier, on October 23, 1964, a boat carrying passengers to a fair in the Saharsha district, sank in the Kosi

and 100 people were drowned. On February 12, 1971, 30 persons digging the foundations of a canal at Giridhi were buried alive. A mine disaster at Jitpur on March 18, 1973 resulted in 49 deaths.

Human life is cheap in India; it is cheaper in Bihar. In the notorious Dhori mine disaster on May 28, 1965, 268 persons lost their lives. A Court of Inquiry headed by Justice E K Das of the Supreme Court reported in December and held the management responsible. Mr Shah Nawaz Khan, the Deputy Minister for Labour told the Lok Sabha on March 2, 1966 that the mineowners had tried to mislead the Court of Inquiry but "we are determined to punish" those responsible. But nobody was punished. On the other hand, Mr Kamakshya Narayan Singh, Raja of Ramgarh, director of the company which owned the mine (its virtual owner), became a minister of a Congress Party Government led by Mr Harihara Singh, long enough for the Venkatrama Iyer Commission to hold that he had misused his powers. The inclusion of the Raja in the Cabinet on March 7, 1969 led to the resignation of Mr C Subramaniam from the Congress Working Committee. The Raja himself was forced to resign on March 20, in the face of a fierce opposition campaign led by the CPI, and later died peacefully in bed.

In Bihar, disasters of every kind tend to be distorted like images in an enlarging mirror. Small Pox which had been largely controlled in India broke out in a virulent, epidemic form. Bihar, as ever was the centre. Medical teams from the World Health Organisation and the Government of India were sent. But between January 1973 and mid-July 1974, when they felt they had some grip over the situation, more than 15,800 people had died. How many survived, blinded or disfigured, has not been reported in the daily press.

While these are the special and agonising excesses of Bihar, the State shares with the rest of India the burdens of inflation and corruption. This is scarcely the occasion to elaborate on these problems. But it is necessary to underline some facets of corruption that impinge sharply on Bihar and the current Movement. It would appear from the numerous utterances of

Mr Narayan and his self-appointed acolytes that they are almost exclusively stressing political corruption. But today the evil is so widespread that hardly any section of the population can escape that charge.

The lawyer who collects "ON" money, or countenances useless litigation to provide work for himself, or colludes with counsel of the opposite side to take needless adjournments is corrupt. The doctor who fleeces his patients, or neglects them, or works more in the interests of the drug industry than of his patients, and keeps no account of his income is being corrupt. The journalist who writes not because of his conviction but merely because he is paid extra, or has to keep his job is corrupt. The employee who spends time in tea and chatter and does not work adequately for his wage is corrupt. Trade Union corruption is growing into the proportions of an immense, if unexplored scandal.

While corruption has thus extensively penetrated professional ranks, it is its prevalence at every level of Government that has aggravated the already vicious stranglehold of bureaucracy on our daily lives. The bureaucracy has become a vast engine of resistance and obstruction. It is a monster; it is like a tiger which has tasted blood. The people get only small bits of the picture. The housewife has to stand in humiliating queues in sun and rain and still perhaps pay extra to get her daily needs; the industrialist, the businessman, the importer, the foreign exchange seeker for however innocent and legitimate a purpose, the traveller who wants a rail or bus ticket in a hurry because of illness or death—almost everyone has to resort to bribe-giving to get his work done. A judge of the Bombay High Court is reported to have said from the bench that he could conscientiously say he had never received a bribe, but he could not equally honestly say he had never given one.

The bureaucrats and the politicians are aware of this whole picture, and yet they do nothing; they want to do nothing, except to play an enormous hoax on the people at the time of elections. In Bihar, two Judicial Commissions, one presided over by Justice Venkatrama Iyer and another by Justice Mudholkar have turned in revealing reports pointing the finger of

guilt at many political operators. But nobody, not one person indicated by these Commissions has paid the slightest penalty. Their role in politics is scarcely inhibited. The Jayaprakash camp too has men like Mr Bijoyananda Patnaik and Mr Harekrishna Mahtab, who have been condemned by other, similar commissions. Nor are the galaxy of lawyers and journalists active in his cause free from suspicion. Besides, the political thrust of the movement has resulted in the total exclusion of bureaucrats, many of whom are the real operators, because even the politicians have often to function through them.

In an inauguration speech at the opening of the newly created Darbhanga Division on November 1, 1973, Mr Abdul Ghafoor, then Chief Minister, promised sensational disclosures: "People will soon be stunned to know of various sensational and obnoxious scandals of swallowing of Government funds by certain officials." He also said that the guilty officers will be given "the harshest possible punishment." But nothing more was ever heard of the threat. That was typical of the long, tormented regime of Mr Abdul Ghafoor which dragged on amidst gathering anarchy for one year, nine months and nine days.

What Bihar needed most was the smack of firm Government, clean Government, dynamic Government. This meant at the least there should be a well-seated Government enjoying the overwhelming confidence of the Legislature. What it got in the election of March 1967 was a hotch-potch of parties with the Congress winning 128 seats--far from enough to form a single-party Government, in a House of 318. It was bad enough that Bihar politics was riddled with the jockeying for positions of Brahmin and Bhumihaar, Kayastha and Kshatriya, Yadav and Ahir, Tribal and Christian. Now came a two way fragmentation into perpetually shifting groups. A bare listing of the Ministries that came and went in quick succession are enough to show that no Ministry could have ever got down to the task of decent administration.

The first in office after the elections was a United Front Ministry headed by Mr Mahamayaprasad Sinha Uneasy life: ten months. Voted out on a No-Confidence motion on June 25, 1968.

The second, with an obscure back-bencher Mr Satish Prasad Singh as Chief Minister was a stop-gap affair. It established a record in shortest lived Government ever—just four days. Its only function was to get Mr B P Mandal, leader of the newly constituted Soshit Dal nominated to the Legislative Council, so that he could form a new Government.

The third one then, under Mr B P Mandal, sworn in on February 1, lasted 45 days, and fell to a censure motion on March 18.

The fourth was another United Front Ministry under Mr Bhola Paswan Sastry. Sworn in on March 2, 1968, it lasted 95 days. On June 24, the so-called Janta Party of the Raja of Ramgarh withdrew its support and two days later the Chief Minister resigned. On June 27, Mr Jayaprakash Narayan wired the Prime Minister suggesting President's rule followed by a mid-term poll. Only half the advice was accepted. President's rule there was, but the Assembly was kept alive.

Naturally the members could not keep still, least of all the power-hungry Congressmen. The permutations had brought into existence three brand new parties: the Soshit Dal, the Lok Tantrik Congress Dal and the Janta Party. Congress membership had slipped down to 105. Still the party leader, Mr Harihara Singh put together a ramshackle coalition, and headed the fifth Government which took office on February 26, 1969. The Ministry included the Raja of Ramgarh as well as his brother. It lasted 114 days. The Raja was driven out on March 29 and the Chief Minister resigned on June 20.

Two days later, Mr Bhola Paswan Sastry came in for a second term at the head of a Lokatantric Congress Dal-led coalition. This, the sixth Government, lasted just ten days and was out on July 1, making way for yet another spell of President's rule.

Meanwhile, the ever active Congressmen had discarded Mr Harihara Singh and elected Mr Daroga Prasad Rai in his

place. He put together a majority and was sworn in on February 16, 1970. He lasted just ten months and a few days and was voted out on December 19, making room for yet another Samyukta Vidhyak Dal Ministry, this time with Mr Karpoori Thakur as Chief Minister. His regime lasted 162 days. He quit on June 1, rather than face a vote of No-Confidence in the Assembly.

Yet again, for a third time, Mr Bhola Paswan Sastry, this time heading a Congress-led Progressive Vidhyak Dal took office next day, and after 209 uneasy days quit on December 27. At last the Assembly was dissolved. One more short spell of President's rule and the General Elections of 1971. The Congress party won 167 seats, and within a few days augmented its strength with 15 new entrants. But as usual it could not agree on a leader. The choice was left to the Prime Minister. Her nominee, Mr Kedar Pande became Chief Minister on March 19, 1972.

Fourteen months later he was squirming and struggling for life. Bihar was set in the mediaeval mould. No King could rule in peace if any of the barons were dissatisfied with him. Following Mr Pande's fateful call on the Governor on May 27, 1973, the opposition forces mounted a furious campaign against him. He still thought he could ride the storm. But at its meeting on June 24, 1973, the party voted him out: 153 Against, 79 For. But it could not agree on a successor. Once again the choice was left to the Prime Minister. It took her six days to make up her mind on the choice of Mr Abdul Ghafoor, the first Muslim ever to become Chief Minister of that State. From that day till April 7 this year when Dr Jagannath Mishra was elected his successor, he could not have had a day of peace.

One source of trouble was his own party. Sworn in on July 2 with a 15-member team, he left for Delhi on August 24 for the customary discussion on the choice of Ministers to be added soon. He was followed by 125 legislators. They were there to "court the courtiers" as one reporter quaintly put it. Many of them were "professionals" in the toppling game, and had been promised Ministerships by their bosses. Amusing

reports appeared of how these people invaded the Central Hall of Parliament and the MPs canteen run by the Railways and ate up the slender stock of "Rasgollas"; how a lady member, Mrs Uma Pande lost her glasses in the melee of aspirants at the home of Congress President Dev Kant Barooah, and being very shortsighted, she was seen groping her way painfully at the Patna airport on her return. But nothing satiated the power lust of the Bihar legislator. Those who were kept out of the Ministry began at once to plot to get the Ministry out. They would have succeeded sooner too, if the Bihar Movement had not introduced a disturbing element into customary legislative game.

Meanwhile, not only Bihar, but all India had begun to seethe with discontent. Prices of all commodities have been steadily rising over the years. But 1972 marked a new and galloping phase. In a single year between April 1972 and 1973 the All India Average Consumer Price Index rose by 34 points. The escalation process continued till almost the end of last year. During the year 1973-74 prices went up by 29 per cent and money supply by 32 per cent. Discontent was rising to the boiling point. This was particularly so because the Congress Party had secured sweeping victories in the 1971 Parliamentary elections, and the elections to most of the state Assemblies next year on the simple and attractive slogan "Garibi Hatao." Arguments that such an objective could in no case be capable of achievement in a short time, and that the plans made in this behalf were distorted by the refugees that poured in from what is now Bangladesh and the war that followed, are all matters of cold logic which could not stem the tide of rising discontent.

By the end of 1972, it seemed India was ready for some revolutionary upsurge; and the most likely area from which it could come was Bihar. The impatient students of Gujarat, however, briefly pre-empted the possibilities of normal historical development. Incidentally, they probably gave an initial twist to the Bihar Movement from which it has found it hard to recover. In the ultimate analysis, it was fortunate for Bihar and India that there was available at the correct, historic moment, a man of the stature, opinions, temperament and



inclinations of Mr Jayaprakash Narayan to assume the leadership of the forces of rebellion. Otherwise events might have taken a less predictable, less organised and more explosive course. That the Movement was later adulterated by other streams and diverted into other channels, does not in any way detract from this historic truth. The Movement that erupted in March 1974 was, therefore, a historical inevitability. India was ripe for it; Bihar was the ripest.

Mr Jayaprakash Narayan has an almost half a century of public life behind him. But it was a matter of shades and patches, of many changes of front. His most devoted biographer, Ajit Bhattacharjea has gently pleaded that "JP has changed ideologies, but not values." His book is largely an essay in upholding the purity and nobility of Mr Narayan's value system. Values are relevant to personal character. Leadership calls for other qualities too. In India, elsewhere, there is a basic appreciation of loyalty to parties and colleagues. JP has moved from the Congress to the Socialist Party and then to the Sarvodaya Mandal which has now been virtually wrecked as a result of his and his supporters within the Mandal, to fight the next elections in Bihar whenever they come. There is here a note of pugnacity, a spirit of challenge, a taste for combat wholly alien to the Sarvodaya concept. That apart Bhattacharjea's biography brings out how his hero hovered between Gandhism and Marxism, wavered between Violence and Non-violence, alternated from Socialism to Sarvodaya, and how there has been a mix-up between direct participation politics as it is understood in the workaday world, and an aloofness, superior to daily conflict.

Yet this very fact must inhibit the critic from subjecting his past career and pronouncements to harsh analytical scrutiny, and confine his criticism to the present. Even so, it is difficult to forget some things, like, for instance, his long patronage of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. The past is never past, least of all in public life ; it catches up. I think it, therefore, legitimate to quote just the first three paragraphs of a report from James Cowley, datelined, London May 14 and published in *The Statesman* of May 15, 1967, under the heading : "C.C.F. OFFICIAL ADMITS GETTING C.I.A. MONEY."

“The epicentre of the intellectual storm, which blew up last week’s accusation in New York that the activities of the Congress for Cultural Freedom had been tainted by the massive intake of secret CIA funds, shifted to Paris this week when the General Assembly of CCF, consisting of 17 intellectuals from Europe, Africa, Asia and the USA, met under Minoo Masani’s presidentship to consider their future course.

“Any lingering doubts about the truth of accusations were shattered at the outset by the frank admission by Mr Michael Josselson, CCF Executive Secretary since 1950, at an Executive Meeting of the Congress that he had been personally responsible for channelling money from the American Central Intelligence Agency into a wide range of cultural magazines.

“Among such publications which receive money were *Encounter* and a number of similar magazines in Europe, the Far East and Africa. This included the Indian magazine *Quest*.”

Bhattacharjea argues that Mr Narayan was not a good judge of men (page 22) and that in any case he had resigned from the Cultural Freedom outfit once he came to know the facts. A public leader has to answer sterner tests. If he had been capable of being duped once, he could be duped again; particularly when forces of deception and “destabilisation” to use a word brought into fashion by Henry Kissinger, are at large. This is the basis of the subtle and not so subtle rumours and whispers of the possibility of foreign encouragement, financial and otherwise, to the Bihar Movement. Both *The Statesman* and Mr Minoo Masani remain among the ardent supporters of Mr Narayan.

Mr Narayan’s poor judgment of men too, apparently, still haunts him. Otherwise it would be difficult to understand the choice of Mr Ramnath Goenka as his conscience-keeper, the publisher and financier of a journal advertised as “JP’s Weekly.” The editor too draws his pay from the Goenka till. One of the aphorisms of the Hindu Neeti Sastras has a ring of eternal truth :

“One should keep five yards distance from a carriage, ten yards from a horse, one hundred yards from an elephant; but the distance one should keep from a wicked man cannot be measured.” (THE WISDOM OF THE HINDUS By Brian Brown. Page 199)

But let me resume the story with the Gujarat episode. Mr Chimanbhai Patel, a corpulent, pugnacious, ambitious, cunning young man of 44, assumed office as Chief Minister of that State on July 20, 1973 after what amounted to a political coup resulting in the ouster of his predecessor, Mr Ghanshyam Oza. Democracy does not take kindly to acts of usurpation, and a variety of troubles began to arise at once. The events that later burst with cyclonic force began in an obscure way in the demand of students in a college hostel that their monthly mess bill should not exceed Rs 70. With this and an additional demand for the reduction of term fees by Rs 10 they approached Dr Amul Desai, anti-Communist crusader and then Finance Minister, and later the Chief Minister. Failing to get satisfaction they called for what they termed “student curfew” in Ahmedabad on January 8, 1974. By nightfall it ended in a real police curfew. Violence broke out everywhere. Within six days 25 Congress MLAs had withdrawn their allegiance to Chimanbhai. By January 27, the army took over control of Ahmedabad. By then 37 persons had been killed and 88 injured by police bullets all over the State.

On February 2, Chimanbhai quit and President's rule was proclaimed. But the students on rampage were unappeased till they forced the dissolution of the Assembly. It was during these troubles, in mid-February, that Mr Jayaprakash Narayan visited Ahmedabad. He advised the students to give up college for a year and devote themselves to the eradication of corruption. Having sampled the heady wine of student power, they found this advice cold and colourless. Theirs was an unstructured protest. Soon enough the agitation lost its bearings, and the Navanirman Samity broke up into futile, warring groups.

Gujarat provided both an example and a warning to Mr Narayan. The real problem was to transform the potential

power of frustrated youth into sustained, organised action against the evils of society. That this objective has so far had a limited success does not detract from the way Mr Narayan went about solving the dilemma. His chief weapon was the attractive phrase "Total Revolution". On the face of it, the ailing, 72 year old Mr Jayaprakash Narayan was an unlikely progenitor of anything that, with due regard to semantic, can be called "Total Revolution."

It is a mistake to imagine or claim that everyone who is against the Establishment is a revolutionary. Pop culture is not revolutionary. It is a revolt without being a revolution. The Hippie is an escapist. He runs away from something to nowhere. Mr Narayan's biographer has refuted the suggestion that JP's transition from Socialism to Sarvodaya was a piece of escapism. His present activity baffles easy classification. The revolutionary is no escapist. He knows or ought to know where he is heading. He is earnest, zealous; maybe over zealous and fanatically earnest. But he also knows or ought to know that it takes an enormous capacity for endurance, sheer staying power to be a revolutionary. JP does not seem to fit the mould; much less his motely crowd of now formed followers.

The Bihar Movement suddenly burst into public view as a demonstration-cum-Gherao of the Legislative Assembly on the opening day of its Budget session — March 18, 1974. The events of that day are a blur, a tangle of violence and counter-violence, of shooting and arson. The most insane incident of the day was the burning down of two newspaper offices, *The Searchlight* and *Pradeep* by an angry mob, whose identity and purpose became the subject of fierce controversy. The next day, the army was called out as violent mobs went on a rampage at Patna. On March 20, Mr Jayaprakash Narayan came out with a statement condemning the "monumental failure" of the administration. He also condemned the student violence. As violence spread to other towns in a vicious cycle of violence-repression-violence, he slowly assumed leadership of what has been called by the convenient shorthand "Bihar Movement" or more simply "JP Movement."

The course of the Movement is still fresh in public memory. It is enough to briefly note its highlights and try to assess their significance. Perhaps the most moving event was the Gandhian demonstration on April 4, when thousands of volunteers walked through the streets of Patna with their mouth covered by ochre-coloured bands and their hands folded behind their backs, to signify the denial of civil liberties. It was aptly described as "Five Miles of Silence." Mr Narayan called upon the people to paralyse the administration, and as a part of this process, the legislators were asked to resign.

The response for the first call was good; for the second poor. By October not more than 38 legislators had resigned. But observers noted that by the end of August, the police department was the only one fully functioning in Bihar's 31 districts. The colleges were reopened on July 18, after a long recess of four months, and examinations held virtually under duress. The students, and even more their parents, could not hold out any longer. The 200,000 students attending the 270 Arts and Science colleges comprised in Bihar's seven universities began to filter back. Those who followed Mr Narayan's advice fully did not total more than ten per cent. The Engineering and Medical students never joined the Movement.

There can be no doubt that many things that Mr Narayan said echoed the truth in their hearts. There was too much money-grabbing, too much power lust, too much cynicism and vulgarity in politics. The only corrective was "people's intervention." The people's initiative was the sole means left of ending the perversion of democratic politics. The stark realisation of this fact was the main gain of the Movement.

Meanwhile, there was a war. Congress legislators were lusting for the blood of the Chief Minister. If this process could be helped by passive sympathy towards, or even secret assistance to the Movement's followers, no moral or political scruples prevented them from acting according to their momentary desires. If only the Movement had not been there, the Prime Minister would have perhaps agreed to jettison Mr Abdul Ghafoor, but she could not yield a tactical victory to

the Movement. So he lingered till April 10, 1975, by which time, it was judged that the ebbside of the Movement had set in, and no one would claim that the Government was surrendering to Mr Jayaprakash Narayan. In any case his demand for the dissolution of the Assembly had been implicitly given up when he accepted the Prime Minister's challenge to wrest power from the Congress through the normal process of a democratic election.

The Movement was flagging somewhat, probably because of sheer exhaustion. No popular Movement of this kind can keep on and on against the organised might of the Government and the powerful opposition of a well-entrenched political party. The processions and demonstrations of November 4 could be construed as an attempt to give a new impetus to the Movement. That could be the explanation for the contentious attempt to make out that the incident in which, in the hustle of a tense police force, Mr Narayan was injured was really a plot to murder him. Murder plots are mindless and fortunately rare in India.

One such, extremely foolish in its execution as well as in its consequences did occur when on January 2, 1975, a bomb was thrown at the Union Railway Minister L N Mishra at the Samastipur railway station. That sheer negligence and incompetence in giving timely medical aid contributed to his death next morning makes no difference to the intentions of the perpetrators. The nation was aghast and it seems legitimate to infer that with this murder the Bihar Movement began to wane.

A contributing cause of the murder was the sustained churning up of bitter hatred against Mr Mishra by a combination of all the opposition parties (except the CPI) in Parliament virtually throughout the winter session of Parliament. That campaign also signalled the fact that the JP-led Movement had flowed out of Bihar, had lost its single-mindedness of purpose and become a general campaign against the Congress Government led by Mrs Indira Gandhi. It was a dramatisation of the fast emerging confrontation.

The processions and meetings staged in New Delhi on March 6 and the presentation of a Charter of Demands to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the President of the Rajya Sabha, was yet another attempt at dramatisation. It was in the course of a meeting on this day that Mr Jayaprakash Narayan indulged in an unfortunate fit of hyperbole and compared the day's march to the Dandi march led by Mahatma Gandhi. His biographer has said that "he is more a Gandhi than a Nehru."

There have been numerous attempts—interested or sincere—to compare what Mr Narayan is doing with what Mahatma Gandhi had done earlier and in a different context. Mr Narayan has himself claimed that he has taken up where Gandhiji had stopped. Such comparisons are futile and utterly misleading. Gandhiji's influence in moulding the life and thought of Mr Narayan is undeniable ; but that has been only one of several influences. Gandhian aversion to violence is one important strand in the total thinking of Mr Narayan. But it is difficult to distinguish it from a national mode. The overpowering influence of Gandhiji's thought and the campaigns he led is reflected in the widely professed horror of violence, and partly believed inefficacy of violence to achieve specific ends. This faith, though incomplete, has conferred on violent acts a boomerang potential, as has been demonstrated once again in the murder of Mr L N Mishra — though at the time of his death, he was close to being the most hated man in India.

Gandhiji knew by instinct, his most amazing asset, to balance things. He could weigh the possibilities of new injuries sustained in the course of working for a change, or merely in its name, against the terrible presence of old wrongs. He was incredibly determined, but also incredibly sensitive. Free India was his desire, his dream, the inspiration of his daily tasks. He became for millions of Indians an embodiment of what they felt to be important and valuable in themselves. But they were not, as a people, involved (except perhaps marginally) in the evil they were fighting against. While engaged in this all important fight Gandhiji did not seek to destroy whatever seemed important in the old order, or merely necessary for the sake of continuity. All the while he was also making careful preparation

for a new order which was to take over after the first task was done and the British power had retreated. This is the inner significance of his half-articulated desire to convert the Congress into a social organisation, so that it could once again become the instrument of the second change he was visualising. But his life was brutally cut off before the idea could be developed.

Jayaprakash Narayan's position is totally different. Primarily aimed at corruption, his Movement misses its target because it seems to be aimed solely at the Government and the party in power. Unfortunately, however, corruption today is far more pervasive. The whole people are involved in it — far more anyway than were involved in the loyalty to the British power. The corrupt are the cousins of the victims of corruption. The same person is often corrupter and oppressor, victim and pawn, caught in the toils of a vicious system.

More importantly, while Mr Narayan could evoke a near unanimous response against corruption, which was the basis of the first appeal to him by *Blitz* (December 22, 1973) his subsequent targets — the dismissal of the State Government and the dissolution of the Legislative Assembly — inherently could not evoke a similar response. There were two necessary all logical links missing between the first, universally acceptable objective — fight against corruption — and the second objective of securing the end of the State Government and the Assembly. The first link was to establish that corruption could not be combated except through such termination and dissolution, and that the end of the Government contained an assurance of the end of corruption. There was the larger, but still unresolved question, relevant to Mr Narayan alone but not to his allies. What is to take the place of the present political structure if it is demolished. Mr Narayan's one answer is: "Partyless Democracy". But this concept has yet to be refined and concretised into an institutional structure. It still has neither body nor shape.

In his open letter to the students (October 3, 1973) which could be regarded as the starting point of the Bihar Movement, Mr Narayan insisted that the Movement, whatever form it took



“must be scrupulously peaceful and non-partisan.” As late as April 6, 1974 — after the fateful Patna demonstrations of March 18 and the subsequent developments — Mr Narayan said in a statement : “I am not interested in this or that Ministry being replaced or the Assembly being dissolved. These are partisan aims and their achievement will make no difference. It will be like replacing Tweedledum with Tweedledee. But I decided to fight corruption and misgovernment and blackmarketing, profiteering and hoarding, to fight for the overhaul of the educational system and for a real people’s democracy.” (Quoted in Bhattacharjea’s book, Pp. 143-44)

How then did the confrontation between the Government and the Movement dramatised and embodied in Mr Jayaprakash Narayan and Mrs Indira Gandhi arise ? It is not possible within the ambit of this essay to trace this process step by step. Clearly the demand to sack the Ministry headed by Mr Abdul Ghafoor, and the dissolution of the Assembly came to stand out as the primary objects of the movement. Step by step, it began to be bruited abroad by the individuals and groups who had gathered around Mr Narayan, that the ultimate target was the Union Government headed by Mrs Indira Gandhi. As this idea emerged, the earlier talk of a dialogue between Mr Narayan and Mrs Gandhi receded into the background. The Government, for its part, behaved in the way most Governments do when placed against the wall. They do whatever they think they have to do for survival. That was the last phase : the Government’s battle for survival, against old and new antagonists, from the Right and the Left, who were pitching their war tents in the benevolent shade of the great Banyan tree : Mr Jayaprakash Narayan. And if anyone who seeks shelter chooses to pollute the roots of the banyan tree, it is helpless to prevent the harm.

A word about the other protagonist in the confrontation, Mrs Gandhi, is in order. She presents a vivid contrast to Mr Narayan. Unlike Mr Narayan with his wavering loyalties, she could claim that she was a member of the Congress party from the day she became a teenager ; that her father and mother and her grandfather too were, each in their time, pillars of the party. So was her husband. For three generations then, it had been

accepted doctrine that the securing of power and the holding of power was the desirable and necessary end of all political endeavour. So it has been through the history of the world in all times and all ages, and all manner of regimes. The only difference has been about the manner of securing power and the purpose for which it can be legitimately used.

Mrs Gandhi's view is uncomplicated. She has secured power through democratic and constitutional means, through legal processes ; and she intends to use it for the most beneficent purposes possible within the ambit of existing polity and the laws circumscribing the exercise of her power, and the socio-economic limitations and compulsions of the day. For this purpose it is perfectly legitimate for her to adopt the most pragmatic and practical method available for the strategy of survival. In this endeavour she is tough minded enough not to be deflected by sentiment, emotion or personal consideration. Therefore, while respecting Mr Narayan personally, she was and is determined to resist all attempts to overthrow the Bihar Government or dissolve the Assembly. This reading of her mind is my own and not provided by any authority. In the case of Gujarat the Government was surprised by the suddenness of developments and was guilty of virtual surrender. A repetition of the process in Bihar, apart from the consequences to Bihar itself, would produce a chain reaction in nearly every State, resulting in virtual chaos.

Mrs Gandhi's single-mindedness remained unmatched with a similar quality from Mr Narayan. He strayed away or was lured away from Bihar to wander far and wide, so diluting the effect of his leadership. The scope and purpose of the Movement has been enlarged. In the process, its purity has been destroyed ; its spontaneity subverted. It is no longer a matter of hungry and oppressed masses rising in revolt, but groups of the privileged sheltering behind Mr Narayan's saintly aura. People who found that the Indira Gandhi administration had pulled away the soft seats from under their tender bottoms, deprived them of the importance they had come to regard as their inherent, God-given right ; and politicians desperately seeking a platform for their customary tub-thumping, publicity seeking,

vote gathering, their endless sordid story of public deception, have gathered behind him. That burden is too much for his frail shoulders. It is like the stranglehold of the Old Man of the Sea. Struggle as he might, he cannot cast off the incubus. He has bitten off more than he can chew. To provoke Mr Morarji Desai's instincts of rivalry for leadership was bad enough, but to try to convert Mr Kamaraj, the most cunning of them all, was destined to failure. The shadowy verdict of history already lowers over the horizon. The man did not prove equal to the task. Though the Movement shows some signs of revival in Bihar, the oppressed people of Bihar may have missed the Saviour they sought. Their ordeal of centuries is not ended.

There, I am perhaps indulging in a rash anticipation of history. Though to seek to peep into the immediate future is a part of the occupational hazards of the trade, a prudent journalist is more concerned with the contemporary scene, the passing parade, life in the raw, history in the making. He has to try to understand the principles, pressures and personalities shaping the future and communicate them to as wide an audience as he can reach. Current politics, therefore, constitutes a large part of the journalist's life and work. It is a common saying in the profession that a newspaper that shrinks from controversy is a newspaper without a soul. *Blitz* is a journal that revels in controversy. It also promotes controversy. It could hardly keep off the conflict between the Government and the forces ranged behind Mr Jayaprakash Narayan. It not only made its own contribution, but persuaded the two chief protagonists to make theirs.

The results of those efforts are now reproduced in this book, not indeed as a matter of remote academic interest, nor as a facet of frozen history, but because the battle still rages, the issues are alive. One phase of the encounter may be over, but the issues are bound to be raised in other forms — through the electoral process beginning in Gujarat and reaching a climax in the Parliamentary elections early next year — or maybe, in other ways.

The issues at their simplest, rawest are whether the political order we have given ourselves is at all adequate to solve the

accumulated socio-economic problems whose unresolved burden is proving unbearable, as also other problems ; and whether within our present social system, we can at all combat and vanquish the canker of corruption. If the answer is negative we have to scrap this political order and build something else in its place. That may call for an effort more protean, more volcanic, something along the lines of China's Cultural Revolution, as Mr Narayan hinted in one of his speeches in Kerala.

□

G N ACHARYA

# 1

## *Forum Against Corruption*

**M**ust corruption become a way of life—the prime condition of existence—in our impoverished land? Are no public men left with the conscience, the courage, above all the incorruptibility and the credibility arising therefrom, to fight and destroy the plague that is polluting the nation's bloodstream ?

Only a dedicated, powerful national forum against corruption led by a clean public figure, like Jayaprakash Narayan, can now weed out this curse from our body politics ; and we are ready to sink all differences we might have had with this Gandhian stalwart to invite him to lead a crusade against corruption.

The first target of the forum shall have to be the galloping corruption in our political life. Let it start by way of a campaign against the black deeds of the Government itself fostered by black money that feeds and fattens the ruling party.

The crusade need not stop with the exposure of the political rackets ; it can proceed to demand public trials and punishment by exposure of the corrupt ministers, officials and other guilty men through some competent agency like the OMBUDSMAN envisaged by former Finance Minister C D Deshmukh.

If the Government obliges with some more credible and effective institution than the existing Lok Ayuktas, which have proved to be a fraud, well and good. If it refuses, the Forum

can move on its own to set up a quasi-judicial body led by a retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to hold trials of the guilty people.

We are sure eminent ex-Chief Justices like Vivian Bose, M Hidayatullah, J C Shah, Subba Rao and M C Chagla would not mind devoting the last years of their lives to the supreme cause of restoring to the land its lost public morality and dignity. The impeachments may be presented by eminent jurists like Motilal Setalvad. This can well develop into a non-official OMBUDSMAN, till popular agitation forces the Government to invest it with full judicial authority.

The time for action is now—before the plague strikes the majority of our good, lowly folks who, we believe, still remain uncorrupted.

It is in the upper echelons of our society and, particularly, officialdom, that corruption has become a fashion. This guilt minority wears it like a badge of dishonour upon its lapels ; indeed, it exhibits it in the most brazenfaced manner by including in excesses of conspicuous consumption. The result is that the cancer is seeping down to the lower categories of Government clerks, even to sepoys with itching palms, who nonchalantly ask that if the ministers and officials can pocket lakhs of public money, what is wrong with their taking a bribe of a tenner or a hundred.

The proposed anti-corruption forum can at least rescue the majority of honest citizens from the tentacles of this relentless octopus. For, today, honesty has come to be regarded as plain stupidity. Ordinarily honest people are compelled to buy the barest necessities of life in the black market. The small farmer or white-collar worker is forced to hoard in his own small way because of the artificial shortages. Whole cities, like Bombay or Calcutta, run on black, forcing everybody whether he be a small trader or entrepreneur or just an innocent citizen, into this all-embracing corruption syndrome.

The very roots of our political life and democracy are being tainted by corruption. To seek an election to a state Assembly,

one needs a minimum of a lakh of rupees in black; while a candidate to a Parliamentary seat has to spend anything between five to ten lakhs. Where does the money come from? Either from the pockets of big industrialists and landlords or from some foreign source or the other. Thus, legislators who form the bedrock of our political life are more likely than not to lose their independence and become lobbyists for their paymasters. Even more ghastly is the corruption involved in party funds with the ruling Congress setting the shoddiest example to others. Crores are extracted in black from major industries like textiles, pharmaceuticals, sugar and oil, on the condition that the latter would be permitted to recover the loot from the consumers by creating scarcities and hiking prices. Thus the ruling party conspires with the industrial and rural obligarchy in what amounts to plain daylight robbery of the poorer and weaker sections of society. One Watergate of this type sufficed to convulse the United States and had global repercussions. India, however, is fast escalating towards a hundred Watergates which already threaten to pull down the Union and State Governments in a quagmire, but where are our *Washington Posts* and *New York Times*? And where are racket-busters like Robert Woodman and Carl Bernstein? This void invests a paper like *Blitz* with the stupendous responsibility to sound the tocsin and hoist the danger signal before the swadeshi Watergates explode with volcanic violence. If Milton's Satan wanted Evil to be his God, Congress India appears to have gone one step deeper into Hell by adopting Corruption as its God!

Take the case of foodgrains, the conservation, distribution and management of which is the first imperative of a famine-stricken land like ours, as an illustration. Food has been permitted to become the football of speculators, hoarders, profiteers and adulterators with the active connivance of the governmental Food Corporation. Tenders for the purchase of grains are given to erstwhile contractors who extract bribes from small farmers by threats to 'lower-grade' their products. These are sold to the Government at exorbitant profits. A former Chairman of the Food Corporation of India, who was also a former Union Deputy Minister, has been booked by the CBI for alleged misuse of power and acceptance of bribes. The

most despicable charges against his regime was one of accepting tenders for mustard and pulses for the refugee orphans of the Bangladesh storm from firms which existed only on paper. One can imagine the complete chaos reigning in the Food Corporation of India from the fact that Rs 28 crores worth of precious foodgrains out of a total of Rs 1,400 crores handled by the Corporation was 'lost in storage and transit'—a polite synonym for official loot.

It seems that the wheels of production in this country can be geared only by bribery and corruption. The Durgapur Steel Plant, which is in a position to ginger up its production to a million tonnes annually, thanks to a combination of favourable factors, has ground to a halt because of lack of coal supplies. The collieries which produce the coal as well as the railways which transport it are both public sector undertakings; and yet railway wagons are not made available for the transport of coal to Durgapur.

Why in the name of common sense? For the simple reason that the nationalised collieries are not in a position to bribe the middlemen to secure the necessary rail wagons!

Sometime in the past *Blitz* repeatedly exposed the Sagar Samrat racket, another example of high-level corruption, which is holding up the off-shore oil drilling operations at the Bombay High, our only hope of surviving the escalating international petroleum crisis. The sugar scandal probably stands unrivalled in our corruption syndrome. Even as I write, complaints are pouring in of the disappearance of this commodity from the ration shops. Why? Because a large volume of the levy sugar has been diverted to the free market to be sold at exorbitant prices! Why should Government so blandly hit the people's stomach? Because its party bosses have exacted crores of rupees from the sugar barons, and the common people have to suffer the political payoff!

One could go on endlessly with similar examples. The lesson is obvious. We need a powerful forum to fight corruption, together with sanctions in the form of an OMBUDSMAN. The fight must begin at the topmost echelons of political



leadership as well as the bureaucracy. It is no use picking on the smaller fry. As the old adage has it, *Yatha Raja, Tatha Praja* (As is the King, so are the people). The task requires single-minded devotion and an invocation to dedicated effort. Let us get down to it before it is too late and the rot consumes our people. □

# 2

## *JP's Reply*

In response for a call to the Sarvodaya leader, Jayaprakash Narayan to lead a Forum Against Corruption, *Blitz* editor, R K Karanjia received the following positive and meaningful reply :

Dear Karanjia :

“It was a very pleasant surprise to read your editorial of the 22nd December, 1973. I fully reciprocate your sentiments; in fact, I never have had any strong feelings about my critics and very seldom felt inclined to join issue with them.

I have been doing something about corruption in my own way, as you know; but I must confess that I have not yet discovered a forum of citizens' action which might compel corrupt politicians to mend their ways or suffer an eclipse of their political career.

Your proposed “FORUM AGAINST CORRUPTION” has my full support but, as you must have discovered, exposures in the press have hardly made any difference to this cancerous disease. Even findings of retired Supreme Court and High Court Judges have failed either to correct them or even mar the career of the persons concerned.

There seem to be only two ways in which something effective can be done about this terrible evil. Either the Prime Minister decides to take strong action irrespective of its

political consequences, or some way is discovered by which the people can play an effective role in controlling this disease.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister refuses to see how the canker of corruption is not only making nonsense of her socialism and garibi hatao and other programmes, but also eating into the very vitals of our nation. She seems to think that by merely denying every charge, even tangible evidence produced, she can wish away the nemesis that is bound to overtake her government and with it this unfortunate country.

She must understand that 'Garibi Hatao' is impossible without 'Corruption Hatao'.

As for the second alternative, I am yet groping in the dark. Maybe, you or some of your readers might think up something worthwhile." □

Jayaprakash

# 3

## *Indira Flays JP*

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi denounced the role of Jayaprakash Narayan and the opposition alliance as utterly negative and destructive in a hard hitting, explosive interview to *Blitz*.<sup>1</sup> She also used this opportunity to finally close the door (and even the window left open, as we put it to her!) on negotiations with JP with the assertion:

“I do not understand what ‘negotiations’ mean. What do you negotiate about? How to destroy democracy? Is this negotiable?”.

When I persisted that, leaving Bihar aside, there could be other negotiable points, she retorted: “But I was told that Bihar was the only point. The other main point is to ‘remove Indira Gandhi’. How can I negotiate about that? There is no other point.”

There was a finality about the statement which closed all doors and windows. The Prime Minister could not be blamed, however, as JP had already foreclosed the possibility of any negotiated settlement by assuming leadership of the old “Grand Alliance” sworn to a vendetta against her and mounting a series of uncompromising attacks on her person, principles and programmes.

In this context, this interview assumes a major political significance. With the Prime Minister’s blitzkrieg, the battle lines are

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1. December 7 and 14, 1974.

drawn for an outright confrontation or as she would prefer to call it, "a class struggle by those who basically are not for any type of socialism, who do not really want any major changes in society", unless such a catastrophic development is averted by a national plebiscite through a midterm poll in 1975.

I had sought this dialogue because several friends and well wishers of both the Prime Minister and JP had urged my intervention, particularly for the reason it was *Blitz's* call to JP to lead an anti-corruption crusade that had brought the aged Sarvodaya leader out of political wilderness.<sup>2</sup>

To our disappointment, the so-called "Grand Alliance" lost no time in jumping on JP's bandwagon and capturing it, a fact which evoked the crushing reflection from the Prime Minister that "I do not know whether he has joined their bandwagon or they have joined his. It is difficult to say who has joined whom!"

The Prime Minister considers JP's agitation as just another aspect of the old Grand Alliance to remove Indira Gandhi. "Now what is the significance of removing Indira Gandhi? It is not a personal issue. Obviously they believe that Indira Gandhi stands for something which they cannot tolerate".

On the main issue of corruption and the imperative of electoral reforms raised by us, the Prime Minister replied: "We also are interested in rooting out corruption, but Jayaprakashji accepts support from some known corrupt people. If that is so, can his anti-corruption drive be serious? These are the people who are now saying: remove corruption! We can only reply: "Physician heal thyself!"

The Prime Minister admitted that "what has happened is that the gravity of the economic situation has made a lot of people disgruntled". But she repudiated my charge that "the Government and your Party have failed", with the Indira counter-question: "Could you tell me which country does not have similar situations and which governments at this moment have succeeded in solving them?"

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2. December 22, 1973.

Admitting, also, the imperative of radical reforms, she asked us: "Now so far as radical reforms are concerned, how can we have reforms in the midst of such movements? Can anything substantial happen in Bihar, for instance, while this is going on?"

"This is what I am trying to tell you from the very beginning that the very purpose of the movement is to create conditions in which basic changes can be obstructed... these are people who don't want major changes in the structure."

When I suggested that the Prime Minister accept JP's challenge as "an invitation to greatness and glory", she retorted: "I don't like these words as applied to any person. I do want them applied to my country; and I think I can say without fear of contradiction that in the last few years this country has reached levels of greatness that it had not before, and that it is being steadily strengthened in spite of agitations, in spite of economic difficulties, in spite of all manner of pressures."

She agreed with the demand for reforms to rid our democracy of electoral corruption and money power. "I do agree that something should be done to curb the expenditure of so much money, and that as many loopholes as possible should be plugged so that corruption is not encouraged."

"We have appointed a group in our Party which is trying to work this out. Already some of our ministers have made suggestions; and some have been accepted. The Law Minister is going to meet the Opposition leaders also."

The Prime Minister ruled out any fundamental changes in the institution of parliamentary democracy because "nobody has been able to show me any method which is demonstrably better"

When I stated that the system seems to have failed, she posed the question: "How has it failed? And which system has succeeded? Do you want the Chinese system? The first happening would be that many peoples heads would be off." The reference could possibly be to the China-lobby in the JP alliance.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Communist Party (Marxist) is amongst the opposition parties that have aligned themselves with the JP movement.

My reference to 1971-promises not kept and the entire programme frustrated brought the heated rejoinder: "I don't agree with you at all. I think we have advanced all along the line, in spite of aggression, in spite of the Bangladesh crisis, in spite of drought and famine...You say: promises are not kept! I assert with all authority: who in the world has kept more promises?"

She went on to allude to the international economic crisis. "Economies are on the verge of collapse all over the world. We have kept our economy going in spite of these difficulties. It is a miracle that so much is happening in different fields, and yet you say there is cynicism! There is cynicism because some people shut their eyes to achievement and go out of their way to create misunderstanding and to keep back the facts from the people."

While the Narora meeting<sup>4</sup>, according to her, was held only to discuss basic policies, the Prime Minister added: "Now, when we were there, naturally we agreed that there had been slackness in the implementation of certain programmes and we should try to expedite them. We cannot get out (of the present crisis)", she said at another place, "except by producing more and by procuring more."

She argued that "there has been no slackness in taking decisions. The slackness is in the implementation and also, perhaps, because the real problem of India is that every question assumes such gigantic proportion."

According to the Prime Minister the Opposition serves only to add to those difficulties: "I myself have been and am an advocate of basic changes in our educational, administrative and legal structures. But changes dislocate and disturb the lives of millions. They can be attempted only when Government and society are stable, not when agitations are undermining national strength..."

"These problems can only be solved by the country being more united and more strong internally as well as being able to

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4. AICC Session.

exert greater influence abroad. Weakness at the Centre or in the States or any kind of chaos will not help anybody.”

From the beginning to the end of the interview, the Prime Minister demanded from JP and the Opposition an honest equivocal statement on their economic policies and programmes: “Is the public not entitled to know what the views of the agitators are on basic issues?” was her final question.

**Q:** You look very calm and relaxed, Madam Prime Minister.

**A:** I am.

**Q:** I mean, in the context of what is going on around this place (Parliament House, where the interview took place).

**A:** What is going on around here?

**Q:** Quite a hullabaloo!

**A:** It is mostly in the papers, I think, and in the minds of some people.

**Q:** We only report Parliament.

**A:** It happens for about one hour in the day. The zero hour has always been like this. I don't think it has become much worse.

**Q:** Our report from Narora is that you have closed the doors but left a window open for negotiations with Jayaprakash Narayan. Is this assessment correct?

**A:** I do not understand what “negotiations” mean. What do you negotiate about? How to destroy democracy? Is this negotiable?

**Q:** Leaving Bihar aside, there are other negotiable points.

**A:** But I was told that that was the only point. The other main point is to remove ‘Indira Gandhi’. How can I negotiate about that? There is no other point.



**Q:** That apart, there is the matter of electoral reforms, educational reforms, anti-corruption measures.

**A:** I myself was told that these are now relegated to the background.

**Q:** Then what is main purpose?

**A:** The main purpose, as JP has stated it to me, is the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly. From the very beginning we have known that this movement was aimed at the Central Government and at me. You will observe that every second or third statement comes back to this point. Sometimes it is denied. Nevertheless, two or three days later, we hear of it again. It is there in one of his speeches reported in today's newspapers. So what do you negotiate about?

**Q:** I was just thinking in terms of the core of his agitation. He has been misled now, obviously because he has got all types of people jumping on his bandwagon, including the Shiv Sena in Bombay.

**A:** I do not know whether he has joined their bandwagon or they have joined his. It is difficult to say who has joined whom!

**Q:** So you feel there is no possibility of any negotiations?

**A:** We also are interested in rooting out corruption, but Jayaprakashji accepts support from some known corrupt people. If that is so, can his anti-corruption drive be serious? He is serious about rooting out some people from the Congress whom he believes to be corrupt. On that I cannot take his word. Over these years I have tried to remove those persons whom I found to be corrupt. It is not as if we have woken up to this only now.

Obviously some wrong people have remained. I am not saying that everybody in the Congress is absolutely honest. But whenever facts come to light, we act. We cannot act on suspicion alone, especially when this is made a political issue.

I cannot seriously take JP's movement as one against corruption. Who are its supporters in Orissa? Who are the supporters in Uttar Pradesh? Or in other States? I do not have to mention names. These are the people who are now saying "remove corruption!" We can only reply: "Physician heal thyself!"

Q: I am glad to have this for the record.

A: I am not saying this about JP himself, but the people who are with him. He does not choose to speak against them. Not a word has been said about the corrupt people who are with him.

Q: Why is it so?

A: You should know.

Q: So all this seems to lead to one conclusion—a midterm poll. That is our interpretation of the situation as it is escalating.

A: I do not know whether that is even possible.

Q: You do not? Otherwise, there might to be a catastrophic agitation.

A: There may be agitations, but "catastrophe" is too big a word to use.

Q: Well, people are talking in terms of civil war.

A: How many people are going to join the civil war? This is an attempt to provoke a class struggle, something which we, the Congress, have tried to avoid and which Gandhiji tried to avoid from the beginning.

Q: Class struggle in reverse, you mean?

A: If classes clash, it is a class struggle.

Q: I wouldn't think of Jayaprakash in terms of class struggle.

A: That is what is happening. People who are supporting the agitation are largely those who basically are not for any type of socialism as we understand it.

Q: They are the upper classes?

A: They may be "upper" or not, but all along the line, they are people who do not really want major changes in society; the sort of changes that we want. I think that this is just another aspect of the old 'Grand Alliance'. Now what is the significance of removing Indira Gandhi? It is not a personal issue. Obviously they believe that Indira Gandhi stands for something which they cannot tolerate.

Q: The Grand Alliance is there, undoubtedly, but for the first time JP has been able to carry dissent to the masses.

A: What has happened is that the gravity of the economic situation has made a lot of people disgruntled.

Q: Quite, and that is where possibly the Government and your Party have failed.

A: Could you tell me which country does not have similar situations and which Governments at this moment have succeeded in solving them?

Q: The poverty in this country makes it a very special problem.

A: That is quite another thing. Your question is: Has the Government succeeded in dealing with the economic situation? Therefore, I ask you: Which Government today, in your mind, whether in America or Western Europe, has succeeded in meeting the economic difficulties of this age? If with their far greater resources they have not, it does not seem very logical to me to say because India is poor and our problems are vaster, therefore we should be more capable of meeting them.

Q: JP's movement seems to be creating a rift inside your Party. Some time ago, during the separatist movement, the same thing happened in Andhra. Is there no way of keeping the Party united at least on basic issues?

A: The Party is quite united, and I can assure you there is no rift. There may be a few people who have doubts, but the Party as whole is solidly united. I wonder whether even those few would have the guts to go against us.

Q: Whether we agree with Jayaprakash or not is another matter, but I feel the present situation constitutes some kind of an invitation to you to greatness, to glory, to revive the spirit of 1969-71, to go on to radical reforms or drastic changes. Electoral reforms, for example. Don't you feel electoral reforms need to be attended to?

A: Look, let us take "greatness and glory" first. As a person I am repelled by those words. I don't like them as applied to any person. I do want them applied to my country; and I think I can say without fear of contradiction that in the last few years this country has reached levels of greatness that it had not before, and that it is being steadily strengthened in spite of agitations, in spite of economic difficulties, in spite of all manner of pressures. I don't think that any individual in India can think of greatness or glory separate from the greatness of our country.

Q: I agree. That is what I meant...

A: The present movement is weakening the country. This is not a movement which can be said to be strengthening the country in any way either internally or externally.

Now, so far as radical reforms are concerned, how can we have reforms in the midst of such movements? Can anything substantial happen in Bihar, for instance, while this is going on? This is what I am trying to tell you from the beginning—that the very purpose of the movement is to create conditions in which basic changes can be obstructed. Whether amongst students or others, apart from certain Marxists, these are people who don't want major changes in the structure.

What is the meaning of "electoral reforms"? Our leaders who drafted the Constitution were experienced people. Now, are the students of today to tell us that "the Constitution they made was wrong"? Can they make a better Constitution? I am

prepared to discuss these matters. But so far, I see no better alternative. Is this gentleman or that more knowledgeable than all the people who sat down to draft the Constitution? Who are going to advise us?

I do agree that something should be done to curb the expenditure of so much money, and that as many loopholes as possible should be plugged, so that corruption is not encouraged.

**Q:** Should not some means be found to make the elections cheap?

**A:** We are prepared to discuss this. We have ourselves made various suggestions. But you must see what we spend on. The larger the public meetings the more is spent. Making it cheap might mean cutting off the masses.

**Q:** Still some means have to be found.

**A:** You cannot say that if Government has to spend less, it should spend less on essentials. You see, democracy is not just a matter of voting. It is an education of the people. You should not defeat this purpose. Why is more spent on my meetings? It is not just on security; it is because such vast numbers come and arrangements have to be made for them. You can't ask us to have smaller meetings merely to equalise things. We don't prevent others from having meetings of lakhs, if they can get such crowds.

But we should be able to spend less on other items. We need not have so many posters and things which cost a lot of money. We have appointed a group in our Party which is trying to work this out. Already some of our Ministers have made suggestions; some have been accepted. But all this is still marginal; it does not make a real dent.

**Q:** Somehow our democracy has come to depend too much on money-power.

**A:** I don't believe this. We the Congress would not have won the elections at all had only money-power been involved.

Certain big business people themselves stand for elections. How is it that they lose? If money were what mattered, how is it that they do not win?

**Q:** One final question about the JP agitation, Madam Prime Minister, before we proceed to other subjects. We take it that the Opposition challenge will make you pursue the implementation of changes and reforms you have been advocating with greater vigour instead of slowing them down in the face of Bihar and all that?

**A:** Yes, of course. I hope you do not think that I have been brusque, but I do feel that the present difficult and fluid world situation demands all our alertness and energies. I myself have been and am an advocate of basic changes in our educational, administrative and legal structures. But changes dislocate and disturb the lives of millions. They can be attempted only when Government and society are stable, not when agitations are undermining national strength.

Today we are suffering from the burden of high prices and other difficulties which are partly due to our own shortcomings, but even more to events beyond our control, such as the failure of the monsoon and the global situation.

These problems can only be solved by the country being more united and more strong internally as well as being able to exert greater influence abroad. Weakness at the Centre or in the States or any kind of chaos will not help anybody.

General and often conflicting statements are being made. Is the public not entitled to know what the views of the agitators are on basic issues? It seems tragic that this moment should be used to agitate questions which are not new and which, although important, certainly do not have the same urgency as that of maintaining our capacity to hold our own with other countries.

India has attained a certain position in international affairs. Our scientific and technological capacity is recognised. I cannot understand how any Indian would want us to appear divided and weak in the eyes of the world at such a time.

**Q:** Parliamentary democracy seems to be falling into pieces.

**A:** Where?

**Q:** In the Maharashtra Assembly, for example, the Opposition was out during an entire session. It will soon be Parliament and Assemblies minus the Opposition if they walk out, if they do not care to cooperate.

**A:** But that is the responsibility of the Opposition. Democracy presumes the cooperation of the Opposition on most national matters. What is the alternative? Dictatorship!!

**Q:** Not dictatorship, but it may be the Gandhian concept of panchayat democracy. He used to call this kind of parliamentary democracy a "barren prostitute"!

**A:** The panchayats are a part of democracy. But what will be the unifying factor? Suppose there is aggression on the country, how will panchayats decide what to do?

**Q:** Ultimately, there will be a Parliament of the panchayats.

**A:** Therefore, you come back to Parliament. But you are saying that the rights of Parliament should be limited.

**Q:** Something has to be done. You cannot even put MISA action through against smugglers. There is something lacking in the Constitution.

**A:** How are the panchayats going to correct lacunae in the law?

**Q:** That is for you to consider. I am only putting questions.

**A:** If you put an illogical question, I cannot answer it until I understand it.

**Q:** The fact remains that somehow the system seems to have failed.

A: How has it failed? Again I will ask you: Which system has succeeded?

Q: Maybe, you are right.

A: Do you want the Chinese system! The first happening would be that many peoples' heads would be off.

Q: The French system. De Gaulle completely revamped the Constitution, because he found that the system that existed in France, somewhat like ours, did not lead to any results.

A: It was not the same system. They were dissatisfied with their proportional representation and felt that it did not give full justice nor did work satisfactorily. And that is what some people are asking for here!

Q: So you rule out electoral reform?

A: I do not. I never rule out anything. I am not a person with a closed mind except on matters of principle. But so far nobody has been able to show me any method which is demonstrably better. This debate was on even before our Constitution was drafted, that is, whether there should be universal franchise. There were people who opposed it because they thought that the ordinary man in the street or in the villages was not good enough to take part in elections. We cannot subscribe to such a theory. We do not think that a person who happens to have a degree is a better man than the ordinary villager.

Q: 1974 is a far cry from 1971, the peoples' expectations of a better deal have vanished with so many promises not kept.

A: Which promises were not kept?

Q: The entire programme.

A: I don't agree with you at all. I think we have advanced all along the line, in spite of aggression, in spite of the Bangladesh crisis, in spite of drought and famine. We must



admit that at some places the programme has not been implemented as it should have been put...

**Q:** Land reforms, for example. Planning, too, has gone to pieces.

**A:** Nothing has gone to pieces at all except in the minds of some people. If they had gone to pieces, do you think I would be sitting here? This in one of the countries in the world where the economy although under severe strain is not collapsing. Do you think it is easy to keep a country like India united? You say: promises are not kept! I assert with all authority: who in the world has kept more promises?

**Q:** Well, we find that so many socialist ideals put forward—the entire “garibi hatao” programme, or reorganisation of land and property relations have not been implemented. Do you feel that the points laid down by you at Bangalore are being fulfilled?

**A:** They are certainly on the way to being fulfilled. I didn't say, nor did I ever think, that we could do it in two years. Have we had any cooperation even in one year? Just the year of the war we had cooperation, but only for the war, not for any programme.

**Q:** Your own States seem to be letting you down.

**A:** They are not letting me down. But some people, from whom I expected support, have certainly let me down.

**Q:** The very fact that this “Grand Alliance” is back in business has caused cynicism among the people.

**A:** What is the cynicism due to? There is an international crisis. Economies are on the verge of collapse all over the world. But we have kept our economy going in spite of these difficulties. It is a miracle that so much is happening in different fields, and yet you say there is cynicism! There is cynicism because some people shut their eyes to achievements and go out of their way to create misunderstanding and to keep back the facts from the people.

**Q:** What do you propose to do about it? You had this meeting, the Congress meeting at Narora.

**A:** The Narora meeting was not to draw up a programme, it was just a meeting to discuss basic policies, and this is what we did. Now, when we were there, naturally we agreed that there had been slackness in the implementation of certain programmes and we should try to expedite them. But none of these meetings, whether the AICC meeting or any other are meant to produce some magic formula. It is not as if I come out and wave the wand and things are done!

**Q:** In some of the press reports it seems that you met in order to devise some kind of a crash programme to meet the challenge.

**A:** It was a training camp, it was very clearly described as a training camp. The decision was to hold training camps, first of Central leaders, then at province level, then in the districts. This decision was taken some time ago.

**Q:** I see. And this 13-Point crash programme, as it is called...

**A:** When you meet you naturally ask: What shall we concentrate on?

**Q:** The basis of the programme seems to be to expedite distribution of house sites for the homeless and strengthen the public distribution system for a select number of commodities. There were earlier party decisions on these matters too. What is the guarantee that this time it will be fulfilled? The public distribution system is absolutely essential for our survival.

**A:** It is essential, but it can only work if we have the goods to distribute. We can have the goods to distribute if production goes up. Now all these Opposition parties were the ones who supported the railway strike. Most of them were the ones who did not want farmers to give us their produce. They are the ones who even now are saying: "you should give higher prices to the farmers, but you should lower consumer

prices''. This way the distribution system cannot be build up satisfactorily.

**Q:** You have to go in for procurement.

**A:** We have gone in. We import about just 2 per cent of our needs, whereas many European countries import more than 41 per cent!

**Q:** Doesn't that mean that there is enough to go round, but the distribution system is lacking?

**A:** We have had floods and droughts. We have pockets of acute distress. Also we have had to help our near neighbours, so that the strain on us has been tremendous.

**Q:** How do you propose to get out of it?

**A:** We cannot get out of it except by producing more and and by procuring more.

**Q:** You are resolved on these two things—the house sites and distribution system?

**A:** We are going ahead with the whole programme. We must concentrate on these. It does not mean that the rest of the programme is abandoned.

**Q:** These are very essential.

**A:** They are very essential and some States have done good work. Even land reforms have progressed, though in some States they are not as thorough as they should be, or have not been implemented as they should have been. But legislation has been passed.

**Q:** You had the Vigilance Committees. They do not seem to have done much. And why was this Congress session silent on land ceilings?

**A:** Land ceilings have been enforced. I doubt if the level can be reduced further.

**Q:** So the whole idea of this meeting was to energise the party cadres? Is that how you would put it?

**A:** It was a training camp. That was the objective.

**Q:** Would you like to explain the three months' limit on the time-bound programme?

**A:** I think it was explained in detail by the Congress President. There is such tremendous resistance in every area to any kind of real change. Now take land reforms. The resistance is not just from some Congress landlords as is made out by the Opposition. The resistance is at the local levels, whoever is the big landlord.

Take the atrocities on Harijans. Why have they increased? Partly, of course, it is that more of them come to light than they used to but partly it is that the local people who have been in dominant positions do not want any change in the situation. When a change comes about, they react.

This is a matter of building public opinion. I think the party has not been active enough in this respect. It is not enough to pass a law.

**Q:** Don't you think that the social composition of the party, especially at the decision-making level, needs to be changed?

**A:** There has been no slackness in taking decisions. The slackness is in the implementation and also, perhaps, because the real problem of India is that every question assumes such gigantic proportions. Even for the bureaucracy at the district level administration the burden is very great. It is all right to blame them for not looking after such and such programme, but they have so much to do that it does affect general efficiency.

**Q:** Was there any discussion of corruption at Narora?

**A:** There was no discussion. What discussion can you have about corruption?

**Q:** Electoral corruption, for example?

**A:** Before going to Narora, we had already decided to study the matter. We are having meetings. The Law Minister is going to meet the Opposition leaders also.

**Q:** About smuggling, I believe you have a report on the smugglers and their political and other connections?

**A:** I have no such report. I have said that if anybody is proved to be connected with, or has anything to do with, smuggling, he will be punished. It is astonishing that the same people who wanted us to take action against smugglers are the ones who shout the loudest when we pursue it.

**Q:** About MISA, where does the main responsibility for the MISA failure lie—with those who framed the grounds of detention, or elsewhere? Somehow, it has flopped.

**A:** How has it flopped?

**Q:** The courts are throwing it out.

**A:** How many people have been released out of the hundreds arrested?

**Q:** Some people have been favouring assigning a big role to multi-national corporations in our industrialisation programme. What is your view?

**A:** Who has been doing so?

**Q:** There is a lot of propaganda, pressure on you.

**A:** I can assure you there is no pressure on me. There is no intention of giving them any kind of foothold in India.

**Q:** Soon after Kissinger's visit to Delhi, the biggest navel exercise by CENTO is taking place near our shores and this time probably you know it is a nuclear exercise. Does this square with the understanding Kissinger reportedly created during his talks in Delhi? What is your assessment of Pakistan hosting this lethal exercise?

A: Dr Kissinger's visit was a goodwill visit and, as you know, our view has always been that we should try and strengthen friendship where it exists, create friendship where it does not, and where there is hostility, to try and blunt it as much as possible.

This was our aim, so far as we are concerned, in regard to Dr Kissinger's visit—that we should try and remove as many misunderstandings as possible. It does not mean that he necessarily agreed to our view-point on all subjects, or that we agreed with him on his.

So far as the Indian Ocean is concerned, we feel very strongly, along with all the littoral States, that it should remain an area of peace and cooperation. Otherwise tension is bound to grow. Other navies, other countries, are bound to want to come in.

Q: Would you like to say something about the present exercise?

A: Well, we have expressed our disapproval. It is a much larger question. It is not just because the Americans are involved that the question arises whether it is good or bad. What will it lead to? And we think it can only lead to tension; and such tension will affect our future progress and the development of all the other countries round about. □

# 4

## *JP Answers Indira*

**I**n an interview Jayaprakash Narayan categorically stated that “the Bihar movement was directed against a rotten system and was not an Indira-hatao affair”. He coupled this assertion with a warning that if the Prime Minister persisted in her present policy, the movement “in its onward march” would “push her aside with so much else.”

In a marathon interview to *Blitz*<sup>1</sup> lasting over three hours, recorded before the tragic death of L N Mishra, JP said that Mrs Gandhi’s nine-year reign was totally barren, the results of which “are writ large on the face of this country.”

He accused the Prime Minister of “flinging all manner of charges at me” in the course of the interview to *Blitz*<sup>2</sup> rather than discussing the basic issues. He then proceeded to refute, one by one, the charges levelled against him, such as the destruction of Parliamentary Democracy, the Indira-hatao motivation, the revival of the Grand Alliance and provoking of a class struggle.

First of all, he squarely fixed the blame on Mrs Gandhi for converting the Bihar agitation into a national issue. He

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1. January 25 and February 1, 1975

This interview was recorded for *Blitz* by A Raghavan and Hasan Kamal.

2. December 7 and 14, 1974

is sure that but for the massive Central intervention, the movement would have achieved its goal, which included dissolution of the Assembly.

He then paused to point out that this policy of 'Interventionism' had stemmed from the Prime Minister's style of functioning which, according to him, had reduced the Autonomy of the States as also of the State Congress Committees "to near zero."

Narayan complained that Mrs Gandhi had never made it clear in what way he was destroying Parliamentary Democracy. Sometime she had charged him with working for a Partyless Democracy which, she thought, was an euphemism for dictatorship.

While swearing by Partyless Democracy as the ultimate goal, the Sarvodaya leader pronounced that this concept was not "a creature of Jayaprakash's Wicked Mind," whereas it was "Implicit" in Gandhiji's thoughts and "Explicit" in Vinobaji's Lok Niti.

The Grand Alliance does not hold any terror for Jayaprakash. On the contrary, he considers the talk of its revival as "a bogey". Importing a sense of humour into his answer, JP said that "the Grand Alliance seems to have become for Mrs Gandhi the same kind of a cry as 'Bonaparte' had become for British mothers in those times."

"By crying about the Grand Alliance, Mrs Gandhi wants to scare the people of India of some terrible danger that might overtake them, if they do not beware and run to her camp for safety", he added.

Seeing nothing wrong in the Opposition (in the present case, it is mainly the Rightist Opposition) evolving a strategy to defeat and replace Mrs Gandhi's Government, he posed two counter-questions : Would not Parliamentary Democracy work better if there was consolidation of the fragmented Opposition? Should not Mrs Gandhi, who is supposed to believe in Parliamentary Democracy, welcome it?



This was not all. JP thought that the Rightist parties would not stay Rightist under the new wave of mass awakening in the country which had thrown up "a new compulsive force" in the form of Jana Shakti and Yuva Shakti. In such a changing situation, he said, "all the old ways of political and social analysis will have to change."

He stated this novel theoretical proposition in answer to a question how the Cong-O, BLD and Jana Sangh could accept his Varanasi programme on the imposition of land ceilings, the distribution of housing sites, on the payment of wages to agricultural labour in the form of food, etc.

At any rate, as far as Bihar was concerned, he said it was not the political parties that were imposing their will on his movement. The situation was the other way round. He hinted that Mrs Gandhi was heading for an electoral crash in Bihar, "whenever the general elections came." She would be "disillusioned", he added, if she failed to understand the supremacy of the Bihar movement over the political parties there.

Holding the dissolution of the State Assembly still valid, JP outlined his election strategy in Bihar: The Sangarsh and Chhatra Sangarsh Samitis would put up candidates. Where they do not, opposition parties have perforce to agree on a single candidate in each of the remaining constituencies.

Jayaprakash Narayan was absolutely evasive on what policy and programme—industrial policy, foreign policy and so on—they would follow in the event of the Indira Government at the Centre being replaced.

It will be recalled that the Prime Minister, in her interview, had repeatedly asked: "Is the public not entitled to know what the views of the agitators are on basic issues?"

A national policy statement, JP affirmed, depended on "how soon similar movements (as in Bihar) arise in the rest of the country." He thought this unlikely in the immediate present. That being the case, he added in a sarcastic vein, he was not "called upon to act as a draftsman for the Opposition parties!"

Narayan is not terribly bothered about the possible corrupt elements in his Bihar movement. He is sure that "they are going to be either weeded out, or cured of their corruption in the purifying fire of the movement."

The Sarvodaya leader frankly admitted differences in the Sarva Seva Sangh on the issue of the Bihar movement and the like. He said he had been accused of party politics and entering the arena of elections.

For him, however, "the election is just another battleground of the peoples' and students' struggle, the arena we have entered is not that of elections, but of the on-going revolutionary struggle, whose aim is not merely a change of government but a social change."

Admittedly the reply was pretty confusing, but there it was. He then went on to repudiate the charge of "deviation" from the Vinoba line, to add that he and "the very large majority in the Sarva Seva Sangh" were not joining the bandwagon of the opposition parties (this was Mrs Gandhi's accusation), but "identifying themselves" with people fighting against injustice and corruption.

Below is the full text of the interview :

**Q:** *Blitz* recently had an interview with the Prime Minister. If we may say so, it was a fighting interview. She rather angrily asked what there was for her to negotiate with you. Destruction of Parliamentary Democracy? —or Indira Hatao? Could you give us your comments?

**A:** I have read the report of your interview with the Prime Minister. I rather liked your questions, but Mrs Gandhi's answers were hardly ever to the point. She seemed more interested in flinging all manner of charges at me than discussing the issues you had raised.

Take her charge that I am out to destroy Parliamentary Democracy. I must confess this is a most astounding statement for a responsible person like the Prime Minister to make. She has never made it clear how I am destroying Parliamentary

Democracy. Sometimes, no doubt, she has charged that I am working for a Partyless Democracy which, according to her, is only a euphemism for dictatorship.

In the first place—and I have made this repeatedly clear—the Bihar movement, while demanding electoral reforms in order to make elections as fair and free, as inexpensive and as representative as possible, does not aim at establishing a Partyless Democracy.

In the second place, Partyless Democracy is not a creature of Jayaprakash's wicked mind. It is implicit in Gandhiji's thoughts and explicit in Vinobaji's Lok Niti.

**Q:** What then is your stand on Partyless Democracy?

**A:** I was coming to that. This explanation does not mean that Partyless Democracy does no longer remain my aim and the aim of the Sarvodaya movement, but it is an ultimate aim which can be realised only in a classless—and also a casteless—society. As for the next elections, whenever they are held, it is obvious that they will be according to the existing Constitutional and Electoral Law. I am doing nothing to thwart that.

It is also our attempt at the same time (a) to strengthen democracy at the grassroots, (b) to evolve a democratic machinery through which, as the Supreme Court has said in the Amarnath Chawla case, some measure of popular consultation might be possible in the nomination of candidates, and (c) provide machinery to ensure a measure of accountability of the representatives to their constituents. In the case of Bihar, the machinery in either case will be the same: the constituency, Students' and Peoples' Struggle Committees.

You will agree that this will greatly strengthen, rather than weaken, our democracy, which is constantly in danger of being reduced to a form without any substance because of the absence of the usual checks and balances and the countervailing forces that obtain in a developed democratic society but are absent in an under-developed society like ours, such as a free and enlightened citizenry zealous of its rights and conscious of its

duties, an independent judiciary, watchful legislature, a free press, a balanced party system, vigilant and effective public opinion, a free academic community, powerful trade unions and other associations of different sectors of society, etc etc.

**Q:** How would you make amends for these defaults of our democracy?

**A:** For some time past I have been emphasising the need for amendments to the Representation of the Peoples Act and, if necessary, to also the Constitution, so as (a) to make the elections fair and free, (b) reduce drastically election expenses, (c) plug all possible sources of corruption, and (d) make the legislatures as representative of the peoples' will as possible.

To that end, I have set up a committee of experts who will be reporting, I hope, in a fortnight's time. After that I propose to call a conference of party leaders, including those of the Congress, to consider its recommendations, and if possible to evolve agreed proposals for amendments to the Constitution and Electoral Law and Rules. Can this be construed, by any stretch of imagination, as a plot against democracy?

**Q:** Mrs Gandhi saw in the Bihar stir a movement against the Centre, against her personality, an attempt to provoke a class struggle which Gandhiji and the Congress had avoided, and the reforging of another Grand Alliance. As she put it to *Blitz*, you and your supporters want to remove her because she stands for something which you cannot tolerate. How do you look at these charges, especially on such issues as class war, Grand Alliance, etc.

**A:** I repudiate all of Mrs Gandhi's charges which you have mentioned in this question. She has made them without advancing a shred of evidence. The Bihar movement was not started against the Centre nor against the Bihar Government. It was started by the Bihar Students' Struggle Committee with twelve initial demands.

Eight of them related to educational matters. The remaining four were : removal of corruption, bringing down prices, removal of unemployment among both the educated and the

uneducated, and a basic change in the educational system. It was because of the unresponsive attitude of the Bihar Government that the students peacefully gheraoed the Assembly on March 18, 1974, to induce the Government to take up their demands seriously.

But far from doing that, the Government replied with bullets, lathis and arrests. Thus, the struggle, in fact, was forced upon the students by the Government and not vice versa. Even as late as March 18, the situation could have been saved if the Bihar Government had been less inept and drunk with power and immobilised by indecision and internal dissension.

Even so, had Mrs Gandhi allowed this struggle to remain a State matter, and not herself intervened and brought the whole might of the Central Government to bear upon it, the issues would have been settled long ago. The State Government could not have withstood long to combined pressure of 90 per cent of the students and the people.

**Q:** So you blame the Centre for this nationwide escalation of the Bihar agitation?

**A:** Yes, the responsibility of pushing the Bihar struggle into the national arena, and making it a struggle between the students and the people of Bihar and Centre, lies entirely upon Mrs Gandhi herself. This, by the way, results from the fact that Mrs Gandhi has reduced the autonomy of the States as also of the State Congress Committees to near zero, so that all decisions of any importance are made in Delhi rather than in Patna or the other State capitals.

This, incidentally, is one instance, out of several, of how Mrs Gandhi has weakened and eroded Parliamentary Democracy as envisaged by the Fathers of the Constitution.

But in spite of all that Mrs Gandhi has done, the Bihar movement has not reduced itself to just an "Indira Hatao" affair because it is not against any Individual, but against a System.

If Mrs Gandhi does not take any steps to change radically the system and persists in standing in the path of revolutionary struggle she cannot complain if, in its onward march, the movement pushes her aside with so much else.

**Q:** What have you to say to the charge that you have resurrected the Grand Alliance?

**A:** Ah, the Grand Alliance! This seems to have become for Mrs Gandhi the same kind of a cry as "Bonaparte" had become for British mothers in those times. By raising the bogey of a "Grand Alliance", Mrs Gandhi wants to scare the people of India of some terrible danger that might overtake them if they do not beware and run to her camp for safety.

Forgetting the Bihar movement for a moment, may I ask the Prime Minister, believing as she does in Parliamentary Democracy :

Whether it is not the concern of the Opposition to evolve a strategy to defeat and replace the Government in power?

Would not Parliamentary Democracy work better if there was a consolidation of the fragmented Opposition?

As for the Bihar movement, Mrs Gandhi is completely misrepresenting it by equating with it any "Grand Alliance". It is much vaster than a mere united front of the Opposition. It is a vast upsurge of the people in which the parties merge and lose their identity like rivers in the sea.

I cannot tell what will happen in other States, but in Bihar it is not the Opposition parties which have imposed their will and strategy upon the Bihar movement, but it is the latter that has imposed its will and strategy on the political parties. If Mrs Gandhi or anyone else doubts this, they will be disillusioned whenever the General Elections come.

**Q:** How do you see the result of the elections?

**A:** Mrs Gandhi makes herself out as a radical and suggests that she stands for policies and ideals of which Jayaprakash Narayan and the Bihar movement are afraid. But the people

of Bihar, or for that matter the people of India, would like to ask her what she has done in nine years of her reign, and what radical change she has brought about. The results of her rule are writ large on the face of this country.

Apart from the galloping corruption, curtailment of fundamental rights, rule by emergency powers and ordinances, inflation etc, the percentage of those below the poverty line has kept on steadily increasing, the number of unemployed, both of the educated and the uneducated, has been growing, the rate of economic growth has been reduced almost to zero. What is there in all this for any radical to boast of?

**Q:** How does your movement propose to rectify all this?

**A:** As I said at the outset, the movement started with eight educational and four general demands put up by the Students' Struggle Committee.

Later, it came to adopt the aim of a total revolution—that is, a radical social, economic, political, educational, cultural and ethical change. We are trying to bring about these changes by peoples' action, and this will be a long drawn-out process. Therefore, I have called this movement a continuing revolution. I hope that in the next few weeks the first instalment of these total changes, that is, the short-range socio-economic policy and programme of the movement will more precisely be defined and published.

**Q:** Next comes the charge of a class war?

**A:** Mrs Gandhi talks of my starting a class war. I wonder if she knows that a class war is going on all the time in Indian society, as in all societies where there are privileged and unprivileged classes. So nobody creates a class war. It is only a question of who wants which side of the class war to win.

The Bihar movement wants the 90 per cent population made up of the poor and exploited to win against the 10 per cent who belong to the exploiting and privileged classes and castes.

**Q:** Another of her key observations was that she did not take your movement as a fight against corruption. You have not said a word against those corrupt people who are with you, as she phrased it, and she capped her remarks with the familiar adage : Physician, heal thyself!

Since the fight against corruption in public life and the administration is a major plank in the Bihar movement, and now that you yourself have admitted (as you did recently at Varanasi) sizeable misappropriation of campaign funds by your own followers, we would deem it a privilege to have from you precise ideas on tackling the problem of corruption, which is admittedly not the exclusive voice of one party or a set of individuals.

**A:** There may be corrupt persons in the Bihar movement, but one of two things is going to happen to them. Either they are going to be weeded out or they are going to be cured of their corruption by the rigorous demands of the movement. I believe that the present all-pervading corruption has its roots in politics and power. The Bihar movement is fighting precisely to destroy this root. Power corrupts, as Lord Acton said. The Bihar movement is pursuing, as I explained in my reply to your first question, a policy to prevent power from being corrupted in the future.

It may not succeed a hundred per cent, but I believe a new and abiding force has been created in Bihar which will not allow politics and power to be the same as heretofore.

About misappropriation of campaign funds in Bihar, I have already clarified the matter in a statement issued on January 2. The Sangarsh office in Patna is pursuing this matter and I am sure in a few weeks we will have the accounts from the districts and I will be in a position to say if there has been any misappropriation at all.

As for my precise ideas about dealing with political corruption, I had made some concrete suggestions last year based on the Santhanam Committee's report and reports of the Wanchoo Commission and the Administrative Reforms Committee.



I have also been advocating amendments to the Lok Ayukt and Lok Pal acts and bills in order to make them more effective and plug all the loopholes. The weaknesses of the extant law have been very well brought out by the Maharashtra Lok Ayukt annual reports to the Governor. A number of friends are working on this question and I am sure by the end of this month, we shall be ready with concrete proposals which will be placed before Parliament by the people on March 6.

**Q.** On November 18, addressing a huge public meeting at Patna you reportedly said that the Prime Minister had forced you into the electoral arena, and that you were ready to accept that challenge not as a candidate, but as a leader.

The ideas of People versus the Congress and agreed candidates against those of the Congress and the CPI were advanced. What then is your election strategy now that even a snap poll is in the air? Political parties cannot be wished away and as things stand today, how do you propose to harmonise their conflicting interests in the election?

**A.** As I had explained in my speech on November 18 in Patna, the responsibility of dragging the issue of dissolution of the Bihar Assembly and resignation of the Ministry into the electoral arena lies squarely on Mrs Gandhi's shoulders. Rejecting the demand of the Bihar movement, I had put forward before her on November 1, which she had said in her public speech the same evening that she would rather resign than dissolve the Bihar Assembly, and that the issue would be settled at the husting, and further that Jayaprakash Narayan should keep his patience until then. I had no alternative but to accept her challenge.

For me the issue to be decided at the election, whenever it takes place, is not whether the Congress wins or loses, but whether the people of Bihar are with the struggle or against it. Thus, there would be, as I had explained, only two sides to the election: One, the Sangarsh Paksha (the Struggle side), and the other the Sangarsh Virodhi Paksha (the Anti-struggle side). The strategy to be followed will be that wherever the Students' and Peoples'

Struggle Committees may wish they will set up their own candidates. In such constituencies, no Opposition party will set up any candidate.

For the rest of the constituencies the parties will have to agree among themselves and set up only one candidate per constituency. In the Bihar situation, the opposition parties have no option but to follow this strategy. Should there be a snap election, there would be no change in this strategy.

**Q.** Although you have been articulating on the concept of a Total Revolution and Total Restructuring of Society, you have not yet put forward an overall Socio-Economic Programme for the whole country. What is described as a Manifesto you issued at Varanasi, besides its being valid for only UP, covers only the agrarian problem. In the event of the Congress being replaced at the Centre, what alternate policies would the successor regime follow on such issues as industry, public sector, foreign policy and the like? Would you care to give us some ideas?

**A.** As I have already said, the socio-economic programme of the Bihar movement would soon be published. For a National Policy Statement, it all depends on how soon similar movements arise in the rest of the country. In the event of a countrywide movement developing, it would become imperative to define a national policy bearing upon industry, trade, foreign relations, etc. It is not likely that such a movement will develop before a snap poll, if such a poll does take place.

In that case, I do not think I am called upon to act as a draftsman for the opposition parties. It is only in the context of a nationwide peoples' and youth movement that I have any responsibility in such matters. This does not mean that the Bihar movement would remain silent on these questions. Broadly speaking, its policy and programme would be cast in the Gandhian mould. For details you will have to wait, as I have just said, for a few weeks more.

**Q.** The programme you have given out at Varanasi for UP calling for enforcement of land ceilings, distribution of

house-sites, payment of wages to agricultural labour in the form of food, etc, is decidedly a left-radical programme if we may use that expression. But do you think opposition political parties like the Congress (O), BLD and Jana Sangh will be enthusiastic about it? In that event, how do you visualise the future of your movement in the country as a whole?

A. The Varanasi programme—some items of which have been mentioned in your question—was worked out jointly by the representatives of the opposition parties named by you. I see no reason why, having committed themselves to that programme, they would be lukewarm about implementing them. But if they do happen to drag their feet as the Congress has done in implementing its land reforms and other progressive laws, they also would have to face the wrath of the people and the students.

I think what is not appreciated is that as a result of the present wave of mass awakening, a new compulsive force has been created which, if properly organised and directed, should play a vital part not only in the implementation of laws, developmental and welfare programmes, etc, but also in involving the people and the youth in the tasks of social change and reconstruction.

Two new forces have been created in the country: one, Jana Shakti (Force of the People), and the other Yuva Shakti (Force of the Youth). The organised form of these two forces in Bihar is Jana Sangarsh Samiti (Peoples' Struggle Committee) and Chhatra Sangarsh Samiti (Students' Struggle Committee). Similar committees are springing up all over the country.

These committees have to be coordinated, nurtured, strengthened and guided. This is a new political development which everyone has to reckon with. All the old ways of political and social analysis will have to change in order to take into account the working of these two new forces.

Q. Now that attention may possibly be concentrated on the Lok Sabha election, what will be the shape of the Bihar movement? Does the major demand for dissolution of the

State Assembly still hold good? How much help has the Bihar movement received from the National Coordination Committee set up at Delhi recently?

A. I have already answered the first part of this question. The demand for dissolution of the Bihar State Assembly stands, but if Mrs Gandhi has made up her mind not to dissolve the Assembly, the issue will be decided, as she has said, at the next election. This has already been dealt with earlier.

Two concrete types of help have come for the Bihar movement from the National Coordinating Committee: First, a number of workers have been sent by different parties to work in Bihar, and some party leaders have toured the State and others will do so in the future. Two: the Bharatiya Lok Dal, the Jana Sangh and the Socialist Party have promised a lakh of rupees each for the movement. This is a very substantial help.

Q: There have been reports of acute differences in the Sarva Seva Sangh on the nature of the movement you have been leading in Bihar and elsewhere. What are these differences?

A: It is true there have been differences in the Sarva Seva Sangh over the Bihar movement, but these differences were beautifully resolved by Vinobaji last July, when the Sarva Seva Sangh had met at Wardha. After that the vast bulk of the Sarva Seva Sangh members lent various kinds of support to the Bihar movement. Those dozen or so of the Sangh members who disagreed did not create any difficulties for us and carried on their usual work.

But after my speech of November 18, in which I accepted Mrs Gandhi's challenge, as already recounted earlier, the differences came up to the surface again, and a large number of members felt that I had deviated from what Vinobaji had allowed last July.

I have been accused of entering party politics and the arena of elections. My reply, as I have explained already, is that for

me the election is just another battleground of the peoples' and students' struggle, and that the arena we have entered is not that of elections but of the ongoing revolutionary struggle whose aim is not merely a change of government but a total social change.

Thus, I and my colleagues in the Sarva Seva Sangh, who still form a very large majority, repudiate the charge of deviation. It is not political parties with which we are identifying ourselves but with the people struggling against a corrupt, oppressive and incompetent regime and an iniquitous social order. □

# 5

## *Public Opinion*

THE present explosive situation in India, particularly in the wake of the great Indira-JP debate, has led to a great deal of awakening amongst the thinking masses of India. The interviews with Indira Gandhi and Jayaprakash Narayan in *Blitz* raised a tremendous controversy amongst the readers, the forces of opinion joining under the banner of the establishment as well as the opposition. The diversity of opinion calls for greater introspection in not only this historic debate but also in terms of national welfare. It is surprising to note that a good deal of opinion aligns itself with JP's goal for total revolution, obviously without being conscious of its consequences. We reproduce below a cross-section of the readers' opinion on this burning subject.

### *JP the Shaktiman*

Reader *Anil Rangnekar* from Poona writes: "JP's interview is an answer to the Lead Kindly Light voiced by millions of people who had read bits and pieces about the Bihar movement, but were confused as to what it was all about. The two new forces he evokes, *Jana Shakti* and *Yuva Shakti*, are like the wakening of the national *Kundalini* which can resurrect a land people crucified on the cross of corruption and maladministration.

JP projects one of the alternatives in the country; and every alternative must be welcomed because it makes the



Government more accountable. Until now, and sad to say even now, the Government and its bureaucrats go around as if they didn't give a damn about the people, propagating in practice a brewery-cum-casino economy whilst preaching the need for a public distribution system.

As JP's movement catches on, and pockets of alternatives questioning the life style and putting a rein on corrupt practices spring up in every city, town, village, road, land, mohalla, home and slum, the people will come into their own and get the kind of government they want—and deserve."

### *History's Warning to Indira Government*

*Lalbai M Zaveri* from Bombay writes : "Jayaprakash Narayan's rejoinder to the Prime Minister's interview, as also his intervention in the Indian political scene, have well served their purpose by writing upon the walls History's own warning to the Indira Gandhi Government to wake up and take action against the galloping inflation and corruption before the latter provokes the harassed people into a bloody revolt.

It is good for all concerned, including both the Opposition and the Government, that a responsible, peaceful, non-violent Gandhian who is too old even to think in terms of assuming the seat of power at New Delhi has undertaken this mission. It is useless to ask JP to spell out the ideology and programme of the Opposition. His job was to carry dissent to the masses, as *Blitz* Editor Karanjia rightly told the Prime Minister; and he has performed it successfully. Government has been forced into some public accountancy.

If only the Prime Minister and her Government accept his challenge in the right spirit and execute their GARIBI HATAO programme, there will be no need for any alternative manifesto or confrontation. Their refusal to do so in Bihar, the most mis-governed State of the Union, has brought about the present national conflict in which her Government can only face defeat.

The Congress rout at Jabalpur proves the relevance of the JP agitation."

### *White Paper on Maruti*

*Arun Singh* from Chandigarh writes : "The main issue of the great debate is corruption and the imperative of wiping it out. While the Prime Minister was right when she told *Blitz* that "JP accepts support from known corrupt people", neither she nor her colleagues can accuse the Sarvodaya leader of personal or family corruption.

On the other hand, the Maruti scandal involves Mrs Gandhi and her family in one of the worst charges of corruption. We hear rumours that while crores have been raised by the Maruti company from the people, the car has not been able to put its own engine on the assembly line, and had to use smuggled engines for the one or two models exhibited.

These may all be false and motivated charges, but we would like to know when the Maruti is going into production. In fact, a clean, white paper on the whole affair disproving the charges has become necessary for the credibility of Mrs Gandhi and her Government."

### *JP : A New Compulsive Force for Change*

*G N P Nair* from Trivandrum writes : "Jayaprakash Narayan's interview has served to clear the cobwebs deliberately created around his movement by vested interests in the ruling party. JP's contribution is the awakening of what he so beautifully terms "a new compulsive force, which if properly organised and directed should play a vital part not only in implementation of laws, developmental and welfare programmes, but also in involving the people and the youth in the tasks of social change and reconstruction."

JP, as his interview suggests, is the trigger, the detonating force that has awakened an impotent, helpless, inert nation crushed by despair and frustration; a nation that could see no



ray of light at the end of the long long tunnel that the ruling party had darkened with its corrupt, anti-people policies.

In the last three to four years the country witnessed immeasurable depths of despair and no alternative was in sight. The opposition reacted rather than acted. Then came JP like a colossus, a symbol of everyman's desire to stand up to a corrupt, irregularitarian, despotic regime."

### *No Ideas*

*Sunil Bakshi* from Ranchi : "Mrs Gandhi's Government has no ideas to improve the economy or the condition of the masses living below the poverty line. If it had, it would not have gone in for TV, which does not save those dying of exposure and malnutrition, and means nothing to those who have never tasted rice.

It is frustrating and annoying to hear the Prime Minister talk about 'consumer resistance' to bring down prices, and about the educational system not being faulty as our educated unemployed are in demand in foreign countries, and, also, of inflation being a global phenomenon."

### *JP is Right*

*Roohan-Nafs*, Nagpur: "To Jayaprakash Narayan the root of all corruption is the rotten system which he wants to replace with partyless democracy. JP is right to some extent, because the existing system of party politics, in which avarice for power and pelf is the sole inspiration, has paved the way for all pervading corruption."

### *In Capable Hands Only*

"I agree that there should be a partyless democracy," says reader *N S Gupta* from Sehore in Madhya Pradesh, "as after independence Mahatma Gandhi had wisely advised the dissolution of the Congress. Indira Gandhi may be right in saying all opposition parties are corrupt and incapable of holding governmental reins, but so is the Congress which has commit-

ted many blunders, failing to handle the food problem and to check prices of essential commodities. It has also not fulfilled its promises regarding 'mass education' and removal of poverty.

The Government must, therefore, be formed of independent, well-educated and experienced persons. It is beyond imagination that the fate of the masses should be left in the hands of rubber stamps and people unable to guide."

### *Avoid Negative Confrontation*

"There is nothing objectionable in JP's demand to rid the country of corruption, bring down prices and introduce electoral and educational reforms.

In democratic countries, leaders are removed and replaced, depending on their performance and popularity. Leadership is not a matter of divine right. The confusion on this as on many other issues stems, perhaps, from the Congress partnership with the CPI, which is advocating a Kerala-type Government all over," contends reader *S Sitaram* from Tamilnadu.

"The Prime Minister should, therefore, boldly meet JP's demand for President's rule in Bihar half-way, followed by elections, and set up a high-powered probe into political and administrative corruption. Positive cooperation and not negative confrontation is the need of the hour."

### *Soul Awakened*

*Phulel Singh* from Jammu: "The electoral method has proved too expensive for our country's need. The idea of a Janta candidate without party affiliations is a matter for serious consideration.

The present elections are all the game of a superior God—money. We must, therefore, reform this system. The voter is fed up and he wants a change. He wants to propitiate the soul of Mahatma Gandhi at the call of Jayaprakash Narayan. I think the soul of India is awakened. JP is doing nothing but interpreting the voice correctly."

## *Indira Gandhi was Evasive*

*Samidh Chatterjee* from Calcutta writes: "Mrs Gandhi calls JP's movement reactionary and fascist and thinks that by simply discrediting the organiser of the movement she will be able to shelve the issues of public discontent for some more time.

Her evasive replies on basic issues like corruption, electoral reforms, food problem, unemployment, inflation etc, made her position still weaker and her radical image more blurred. Her role in breaking the Railway strike is most reprehensible and brings out the incipient dictator in her.

On the other hand, JP has diagonalised the causes of the present national malady. His remedies may seem to be somewhat drastic in the present context, but unless the right of the recalling erring and corrupt rulers is restored to the people, violence and anarchy will become inevitable."

## *Unworthy*

*A K Gayasen* from Bokaro: "It is apparent that the Prime Minister has gone bankrupt in ideas and thoughts. In her interview she eloquently tried to defy the political and economic crisis with lame arguments. Actually, she does not want to understand the real crisis. It was shameful to read "who kept more promises than us in the world?" In brief, none of the answers were worthy of the Prime Minister of India."

## *Deadweight*

*P M Philipose* from Bombay writes: "The Prime Minister seems to be pulling a deadweight that has been taking her nowhere. Unless her colleagues in the Government and the party, as well as the bureaucracy, are shaken to the roots nothing revolutionary will be achieved under Congress rule. Under the prevailing confusion, naturally, the people are drawn to Jayaprakash Narayan as he is sincere, though his ways are more difficult than Indira's. The Congress must reform itself."

### *PM's Hollow Pretentions*

"Mrs Gandhi fumes at JP's movement as a sinister plot to destroy parliamentary institutions and democracy. We have heard this poppy-cock before," says reader *N V L Narasimham* from a remote place like Saluru.

'One would like to know what democratic virtues she has cared to safeguard during the long tenure of her office? The manner in which the Constitution is reduced to a mere Municipal law, fundamental rights are abridged, emergency is promulgated, the officially-sponsored Presidential candidate was let down, the Supreme Court Judges were superseded, and dissent muzzled, are only a few instances to show the hollowness of her democratic pretentions.

Truth is that all her accusations are an expression of a desperate effort to suppress an awareness of her failure, inadequacy, and guilt."

### *In appropriate .*

*P P Vasudevan* from Perintalmanna: "The Prime Minister is guilty of shielding corruption and inefficiency. Her party is divided into Left, Right and Centre. It lacks the political will and courage of its convictions, hence, she has no right to condemn JP for deriving support from parties with conflicting ideologies, lack of policies and programmes, and for reviving the Grand Alliance. Even a Grand Alliance is welcome if it can check corruption, inflation and unemployment."

### *Done Nothing*

*D M Nagarkatty* from Bombay: "Assuming the JP movement aims at 'Indira Hatao', why should the Prime Minister be upset, as India is a democracy where Prime Ministers can come and go according to the prevailing political weather. As for reforms, Mrs Gandhi has had a massive mandate to bring them about, but she has not done anything."

## *Second Tryst*

*P Shanker Rao*, Koraput: "JP's total revolution is on the march. The masses will provide it the power as it stands for a social revolution, eradication of corruption and removal of casteism. Many say that partyless democracy is a myth, that it has no precedent. But Satyagraha and non-violent resistance, too, had no precedent. The year 1975 is going to be India's second Tryst with Destiny."

## *Gimmicks to Stay in Power*

*M Adhikari*, Bombay: "Let us face the facts. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is no great shakes as a leader. She has initiated no positive, well-deliberated, constructive programme for the nation's or the public weal. All her so-called progressive steps have been no more than mere reactions to situations than the results of considered possibilities and consequences.

Instances are many and glaring. The Congress spilt in 1969, the nationalisation of banks and the abolition of the Princes' Privy Purses, in rapid succession, to mention only a few, sprang from her pique at Morarji Desai's presumptuous claims to leadership and imagined attempt to topple her from office.

Her 'Garibi Hatao' slogan was a desperate effort to gain popularity, which is fast eroding under the stress of economic hardships. And to top it all, she has been blaming the opposition parties, the trade unions and world developments for her mismanagement.

Let it also be remembered that it is *She* and *Her* government which have been giving all sorts of concessions to the business and vested interests while calling upon the working classes not to make more demands or strike for better deals. Is it any wonder then that JP is getting the response he does?"

## *Radicalising Right Liberalising Left*

*N Achanta*, Hyderabad: "JP is not destroying parliamentary democracy by demanding the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly

and resignation of the Bihar Ministry. Both have made nonsense of parliamentary democracy by allowing Ordinance-raj.

Partyless democracy is a concept common to Sarvodaya and the last stage of Marxism (when the State withers away). The Prime Minister may now be tempted to dub Marx, also, a fascist! Mrs Gandhi's statement about mass movements and radical reforms is rank ingratitude to the masses who supported her token progressive measures in the past. Come 1974, and mass action becomes incompatible with democracy.

JP's refusal to lead a united Opposition party proves that he is fighting a system. JP's efforts to consolidate the fragmented Opposition by radicalising Rightists and liberalising Leftists will help check dictatorial trends in our sick democracy."

### *PM-JP Axis?*

*B S Kapoor*, Lucknow: "In the context of the growing internal as well as external crisis India today faces, JP's agitation can only be counter-productive. As Indira Gandhi rightly asks: 'Now so far as radical reforms are concerned, how can one inaugurate them in the midst of such movements? Can anything substantial happen in Bihar, for example, while the agitation is going on?'

Whatever be the motives of JP, the Prime Minister is right in exposing the purpose of the motley group behind him as 'to create conditions in which basic changes can be obstructed... These are people who do not want major changes in the structure.'

As a Gandhian and patriot, JP must join the Prime Minister in a truly national, supra-party effort to save the country."

### *Dynamic PM-JP Combination*

*Ibayaamia Laithangam*, Calcutta: "Though JP has not, as the Prime Minister has charged, spelt out his views on basic issues, he certainly has in mind viable alternatives. And Mrs Gandhi

enjoys unparalleled support, popularity and love of the people. Why don't the two charismatic, dynamic leaders jettison differences and join hands to wipe the tears from every eye? With their brains and energies combined, no power can deter India from her journey to Democratic Socialism."

### *Both are Guilty !*

*K R Vasudevan*, Bombay: "Both the Prime Minister and JP are guilty! Both are trying to fool the 520 million people with accusations and counter-accusations. The Prime Minister has a long list of broken promises, yet she had the audacity to pose the question: 'Who in the world has fulfilled more promises?'"

The Prime Minister also asserts that inflation and sky-rocketing prices are a global phenomenon. Is it that the Prime Minister is refusing to accept the existence of East European countries where there is not even a smell of inflation?

On the other hand, JP is a proxy of capitalists, Sanghis, Margis, adventurists and frustrated politicians. A close observation of the people in the forefront of the movement leads to this conclusion, and justifies the Prime Minister's charge that JP's movement is aimed at ousting her.

It all started in the name of wiping out corruption. How does he propose to wipe out corruption? No solution is suggested. Underneath this movement lies an attempt by JP to come back to politics with an eye on power."

### *Both Indira and J,P, Negative Teachers*

*Gilbert Lobo*, Bombay: "JP's movement is welcome so long as it helps to crystalise the disappointment and frustration of the masses at the total betrayal of Mrs Gandhi.

However, judged by the company JP keeps, there is real danger of his movement leading to the foisting of a fascist dictatorship on the country.

It is necessary to warn JP that so long as he does not bring in the workers and the peasants in his movement and make them the leading force of his 'total revolution' and does not propound a democratic land reform, his movement will not solve the problem of poverty in the country. It will be a greater failure than the much publicised 'Garibi Hatao' programme of Mrs Gandhi and will lead to a backlash, paving the way for a dictatorship.

JP cannot talk of corruption while taking help from the most corrupt elements in the present society.

It is a tragedy of the left democratic movement in the country that it cannot rally the people for a united front for ensuring a decent living to the people. Until the left movement matures up in the course of the struggle, programmes like 'Garibi Hatao' or 'Total Revolution' will be flourished to fool the people and exploit them. At best, these movements are 'negative teachers', they will fizzle out and expose the bankruptcy of the Leaders."

### *Better the Devil We Know*

C S Desai from Ahmedabad: "The crux of the Indira-JP debate, in our considered opinion, lies in the Prime Minister's question: 'Is the public not entitled to know what the views of the agitators are on basic issues?'—to which the Sarvodaya leader has apparently no answer.

Blitz put the issue to him directly as to what policy or programme the Opposition alliance would follow as an alternative to the Indira Gandhi government.

JP's reply was a masterpiece of evasion: 'I do not think I am called upon to act as a draftsman for the opposition parties... Broadly speaking, our policy and programme would be cast in the Gandhian mould'.

It is obvious that the Sarvodaya leader is unable to persuade the ideological contradictions under his command, like the Jana Sangh and RSS, on one side, and the SP and CPM on the



other, to agree to a minimum common programme. This leaves us with no alternative barring preference for the devil we know to the devil we don't.

The Indira Gandhi Government has a fairly radical policy and programme of socio-economic changes; let us force her with democratic pressures rather than trust its scuttle to the JP-led Opposition with its reactionary, laissez-faire outlook."

### *Where was JP then?*

*Simon Jacob, Ajman (UAE):* "Corruption was not born in the Indira Gandhi regime. Why did JP not raise the issue earlier, when famine and death inflicted untold sufferings on millions of Biharis? Was he not alive to that grave situation at that time? Why he did he not take up his Apostolic work against this evil then? It is crystal clear that JP is bent upon removing Mrs Gandhi, but he cannot come out openly against her. So the so-called Bihar movement, or rather JP movement, is a fraud."

### *Questionable Company*

*Shyam Lal, New Delhi:* "The JP movement has to be judged by the company it keeps and by results it will produce. What is the base on which he has raised the edifice of his agitation?

Is not the 'Yuva Shakti' in Bihar derived from the students who travel without tickets, make even women and children (with tickets) stand in railway compartments while they occupy seats; who enjoy snacks in poor men's hotels or teashops and walk out without paying; who collect funds in JP's name which seldom reach him?

One shudders at the very thought of his much glorified (by JP) 'Yuva Shakti' bringing about the much-talked-about 'total revolution.' One can well imagine the complete chaos, confusion and irreparable destruction and damage that will follow should JP succeed in his mission."

### *Foreshadowed to Failure*

*Bal Patil* from Bombay writes: "My faith in the Prime Minister's leadership is unswerving; my only grouse is that she has not acted swiftly to implement the 'people's mandate', to which she had made a forthright confession.

The JP movement's vacuous essay at confrontation is foredoomed to failure because it is splintered within. The only sensible alternative for a non-partisan leadership like JP's is to strengthen the hands of the Prime Minister in a conscientious bid to persuade rather than to confront her in a true Gandhian spirit.

The people are too apathetic to understand the revolutionary clan, and therefore, it is dangerous to arouse their volcanic aspirations. Before a social and economic revolution can be launched, a 'matrix' for a revolution has to be imposed. This cannot be done in an atmosphere of distrust, and through an agitation detrimental to the people's national and economic interest. Reconstruction and progress are only possible through sanity and amity."

### *Indiraism will Survive*

*S Somansundan*, Madras: "We must make a distinction between JP and JPism and between Indira and Indiraism. JP is a man of integrity, but JPism is rightist, against population control, and for continuation of the old order of things, resulting in widening of the gap between the few rich and the mass of the poor. Indira may be autocratic and encourages favouritism; but Indiraism is leftist, favours population control and aims at equitable distribution of income and wealth.

Nothing can prevent the present day march of the world towards leftism. Indira may be 'hataoed', but Indiraism will ultimately win."

### *No use blaming Indira Gandhi*

*C Ramankutty*, Lucknow: "Revolutions are accomplished

by a leader with clear vision and a definite programme of action. JP lacks both. He has always been a bundle of contradictions with a wavering attitude.

Most of us remain even today a lot mentally corrupted by the feudal system and religious orthodoxy. There is no corruption without a giver and a taker. Unmask some of the leading lights behind JP's movement, and you will find that these, too, are proclaimed social enemies. When that is the state of the national mind, it is no use blaming the Prime Minister.

It is no secret that street demonstrations can be hired, and if that alone is to be taken as the barometer of public opinion, I am afraid no democratic government in India can function from sunrise to sunset. JP has not so far listed a single charge of corruption against any MLA, and it will be the height of fancy to suggest that each and every MLA is corrupt. Perhaps JP is paying the Congress Government in its own coin ; for they should not have piloted the dismissal of the E M S Ministry in Kerala under the pretext of a mass upsurge.

Many of the social evils, including corruption, nepotism, etc can be traced to the institution of the unbridled private property system. JP is remarkably silent about it. It is in this sphere that an assault is long overdue, and once this system is cut to size, the instinct to be over-greedy and over-possessive, and to accumulate and amass will vanish, and with it our major problems."

### *Captive of the Money Bags*

*Datta Tipnis*, Bombay : "JP declared that his movement was a moral crusade against corruption ; but subsequent events proved to the hilt that he was responsible for the revival of a 'Grander Alliance'.

His outburst against the CPI and its alliance with the ruling party betrays his real intentions ; for he is conspicuously tight-lipped about the stranglehold of the reactionaries and vested interests on the Congress.

In view of this, has he the moral right to question the integrity of the Prime Minister, while he himself has been a willing captive of vested interests, money bags, corrupt politicians, press lords and rank communalists ?

At the same time, it is surprising to note that he is very reluctant to spell out his programme after the ouster of the Congress from power. With this background, JP's exhaustive assertions fail to make any impression."

### *PM Hoists JP with his own Petard!*

*K S N Sharma*, New Delhi : "The Prime Minister literally got JP hoist with his own petard when she told *Blitz* that the Opposition leader who pretends to be the scourge of corruption himself 'accepts support from some known corrupt people.'

JP's weekly *Everyman's* is by now notorious as a Goenka-Express publication. Its editor, Ajit Bhattacharjea, is really an assistant editor of *The Indian Express*, whose services have been loaned to *Everyman's* ; and the Goenka presses at Bombay, New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Madras, Madurai, Vijaywada, Bangalore and Cochin bring out the paper every week.

Now a publication like *Everyman's*, beautifully printed on expensive imported newsprint, without a single advertisement, and sold at a cheap price of 35 paise, should cost the Goenkas a minimum of Rs 5 lakhs per year.

Where does the money come from ? Surely not from Goenka's own pocket. Everybody knows that the financial mess the newspaper magnate is in today. Only sometime ago Bombay magistrate summoned *The Indian Express* newspapers and Goenka on charges of misappropriation and cheating on the charge that a cheque for Rs 2,000 issued by the firm was dishonoured by the Central Bank.

Then what agency bears the enormous production cost of a journal like *Everyman's* ? The answer condemns JP and his movement."

### *Clear Stand*

*M G Palkrit, Khamgaon* : “The Prime Minister’s stand has always been very clear ; she deprecates agitations, bandhs and strikes, and welcomes cooperation, discussion and remedies on economic, social and national ills. JP’s movement against a ‘rotten system’ should have exposed the rottenness with practical remedial measures, without resorting to destructive activities.”

### *Rally Round PM*

*R Chidambaranathan, Muthupet* : “Stability and integrity of the nation are in danger. An unstable and weak government at the Centre is suicidal and it will lead to balkanisation. Reactionary elements are reviving the ‘Grand Alliance’ and rehearsing to enact a Chilean-like counter-revolution in India, by hampering production and trying to create chaos and anarchy. All radical, leftist, democratic forces should, therefore, be rallied and realigned under one banner to the call of destiny and unequivocally support the Prime Minister’s policies and accept her leadership.” □

# 6

## *The Confrontation*

THE Great Indira Gandhi-Jayaprakash Narayan debate has now had full and free play since the Prime Minister blasted the Opposition leader in the course of a long, combative interview<sup>1</sup> and the latter rebutted her charges to explain the relevance of his agitation for a “total revolution”<sup>2</sup>.

During this period, the public joined the debate with some hundreds of stimulating and very rewarding contributions. A fairly representative selection from these has been featured in *Blitz*<sup>3</sup> and reproduced in this book.

While a large number of readers back the Prime Minister against JP, the JP admirers make up for their quantitative loss with the quality of their thought and argument. Between them remains a determined group which wishfully persists in arguments for an Indira-JP reconciliation, so that the Gandhian leader can provide a moral base and popular sanction to the Indira Government for the salvation of the nation and its people.

The last argument takes me back to the point where the gods of History prompted *Blitz* to launch the campaign which has since escalated into one of the major controversies of post-

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1. *Blitz*, December 7 and 14, 1974

2. *Ibid*, January 25 and February 1975

3. *Ibid*, February 15, 22 and March 1, 8, 1975

freedom India. Since all kinds of contradictory motives from "betrayal of Indira Gandhi" to "leading JP up the garden path" have been attributed to *Blitz* by political motive-hunters, it is necessary to re-state the objective, then review the conflict and assess both sides to the great debate, before passing judgment on this historical development.

At the outset, let me make it quite clear that I firmly believe that the Premier and the Opposition leader complement and supplement each other. Indira Gandhi is the politician par excellence. She has inherited from her great father the correct national solutions to political, social and economic problems. Added to these, she has a shrewd political instinct and cunningness all of her own.

Yet, despite these advantages which no other national leader commands, her programmes have gone awry because of the galloping corruption and maladministration that bedevils her Government as well as party. JP himself confirmed this fact when he said "unfortunately the Prime Minister refuses to see how the canker of corruption is making nonsense of her socialism, garibi hatao and other programmes."<sup>4</sup>

It was to make amends for this calamity and provide the Government with a moral base and sanction as well as public credibility and accountability that I invited JP to fill the void. I wanted him to re-enact Gandhi's role to purge corruption in the fires of the outraged conscience and moral indignation of a whole people looted of the produce of their labour.

Leaving politics to the Prime Minister and the politicians, I desired that JP organise a National Forum Against Corruption, supported by powerful quasi-judicial tribunals headed by former Chief Justices and public men of proven integrity to investigate charges of corruption and hold public trials of the guilty persons.

My objective was, in the first place, to persuade JP to organise the Forum as well as its operational Tribunal, and

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4. *Ibid*, October 13 and 20, 1973

then get the Government to cooperate with these popular institutions.

If the Prime Minister chose to extend this cooperation to JP, well and good: the two could collaborate to their mutual as well as the nation's benefit. If she refused, then JP could go ahead with his crusade on a strictly moral—that is, non-political—plane till he could rouse public opinion to a flash-point that would force upon the Government the alternatives of cooperating with the movement or quitting.

To sum up, the ideal solution would have been an Indira-JP axis, with JP providing an exclusively MORAL base to the Indira Government. Failing that, JP could launch a crusade to force the established Authority to end its corrupt ways.

But in any event, whether the crusade was launched in collaboration with or in opposition to the Government, it must absolutely and totally abjure political power or party politics lest it should fall victim to the same corruption it seeks to combat.

Having explained the motivation and set the goals, I can proceed to review the controversy in its chronological order. *Blitz*<sup>5</sup> addressed an Open letter to JP, inviting him to lead a crusade against corruption beginning with the “Black Deeds” of the Government which had been previously exposed in a series entitled “India’s Watergate”<sup>6</sup>

JP responded to the appeal in a positive and encouraging manner by assuring that the proposed national crusade against corruption “has my full support.” He added: “There seem to be only two ways in which something effective can be done about this terrible evil. Either the Prime Minister decides to take strong action irrespective of the political consequences or some way is discovered by which the people can play an effective role in controlling this disease.”

JP did not seem to see much hope in the first possibility: indeed, he seemed to reject it. He sounded bitterly critical

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5. *Ibid*, December 22, 1973

6. *Ibid*, January 26, 1974



of the Prime Minister to make persona remarks like "she refuses to see...the canker of corruption" and "she seems to think that by merely denying every charge she can wish away the nemesis that is bound to take over her Government."

These apparently hurt Indira Gandhi in the raw.

As to the second alternative of a popular intervention, JP gave expression to his confused mind with the comment: "I am groping in the dark", to ask me, "maybe you or some of your readers might think up something worthwhile."

I responded to this suggestion by throwing *Blitz's* columns open to the readers. Several valuable suggestions poured in showing an almost national consensus behind an Indira-JP alliance in which JP with the anti-corruption crusade could provide a moral base and sanction to the Indira Gandhi Government.

My SOS to JP found strong support also among Opposition leaders like Madhu Limaye who addressed a press conference in New Delhi to join *Blitz* in an impassioned appeal to JP to devote "the evening of his life to the solution of this single most important problem of corruption"<sup>7</sup> While Opposition leaders were vocal in their support to the *Blitz* proposal, several Congressmen too assured us of their silent consent.

The Sarvodaya leader did not take long to act on the proposal; and the early months of 1974 found him challenging the Government on a moral plane on burning issues like corruption, the misuse of money power in elections and the imperative of electoral and educational reforms. He also responded to the suggestion of setting up an Ombudsman-type tribunal to investigate corruption charges as well as a Committee to recommend electoral reforms.

This development apparently irked the Prime Minister who made unsavoury remarks against JP at Bhubaneshwar in March 1974. She criticised his life style, his habit of staying in posh

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7. January 30, 1974

guest houses (meaning Goenka's) to quip that those who accepted moneys from the rich had no right to complain about corruption. JP retaliated with an angry press statement, accusing Indira Gandhi of "descending on a plane to which I cannot lower myself".<sup>8</sup>

The Prime Minister quickly realised her *faux pas* and made honourable amends, but JP was in no mood to be appeased. His "Personal Bond" with her was broken, he told a leading English daily<sup>9</sup>. And so was her's with him though she did not make public the full extent of her hostility till the *Blitz* interview later in the year.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, what was originally envisaged as a great constructive enterprise for a national consensus turned into a lethal confrontation between the two leaders and the forces represented by them.

All expectations of JP-Indira cooperation having been frustrated, the only course open to the Sarvodaya leader, in the context of his return to public life on a moral as against a political basis, was to continue with greater determination his crusade against corruption with the organisation of anti-corruption tribunals to hold public trials of the high and mighty without getting mixed up in the shoddy politics of parties and power. Power-politics, in my opinion, which JP fully shares, are the main cause of the pollution of our public life.

We had, consequently, expected JP to be the last person to involve himself in this variety of contaminated politics. A Sarvodaya leader committed to the Gandhian concept of a partyless democracy could not possibly function in the capacity of the head of a combination of opposition parties; still less could he be drawn into the cockpit of an election fight on terms which would suit only the strategy and tactics of his political foes.

Yet, that is precisely what happened. JP's excursion into Bihar politics, however imperative and righteous to his way of

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8. JP's Press Conference, April 3, 1974

9. *The Statesman*, June 15, 1974

10. December 7 and 14, 1974

thinking, was cunningly used by the fragments of the defeated Grand Alliance against Indira Gandhi to jump on to his bandwagon and transform it into a new vehicle of their anti-Prime Minister vendatta.

In this process, the JP revolution was forced to sacrifice its stupendous moral and spiritual force to the exigencies of the politics of power; it became politicalised into an election fight between the Ruling Party and the Opposition.

JP's stature of a moral alternative was thereby reduced to one of a political opponent fighting an election battle in the context of the same system of wholesale corruption which he had started off so splendidly to combat.

The subsequent chronology of his widening and deepening rift with the Prime Minister shows how he was misled, step by step, into giving his moral revolution a back-seat on the political bandwagon of discredited and contradictory parties. Let us pursue this chronology.

So we return to the question with which we started : which of them can save India from domestic suicide and external attack —Indira Gandhi or Jayaprakash Narayan? The final choice between the two alternatives, now that JP has openly come out at the head of the Opposition alliance as a political alternative to the Prime Minister instead of a moral force against official corruption, rests on the answer to this question.

It will be recalled that the acute economic crisis facing the country and the Indira Gandhi Government's failure to tackle it was the main provocation for the emergence of JP into political leadership at the beginning of 1974. Since then, another major calamity of a revanchist war by Pakistan looms over the land in consequence of the massive Sino-American arms aid to our bellicose neighbour.

The test of any leader in the context of these double crises rests in his or her capacity to overcome them. To take the second more dangerous prospect of another showdown with Pakistan first, there is no doubt that the Prime Minister has more than proven her ability to deal with a very similar situa-

tion at the time of the Indo-Pak war over the Bangladesh revolution.

It is not that we are asking for war. Far from it. But the fight for peace and the international diplomacy that goes with it constitutes an even more difficult enterprise than defence against aggression. Indira Gandhi is better equipped, in my opinion, for either alternative. This argument is so obvious that it does not need any explanation.

On the other hand, the adequacy of JP for this challenge is doubtful. His personal record during those tense months of escalating conflict in 1971 was not one of a cool confident leader tackling the crisis with patience, cunningness and courage. His confusions and contradictions were evident in his intemperate statements ; and now that a motley crowd of frustrated politicians is riding his bandwagon, we can expect them to make these confusions and contradictions more confounding.

For example, in any showdown with Pakistan, backed as she is by America and China, a friendly alliance with the Soviet Union becomes the first imperative of India's foreign policy. JP and his allies would, however, have none of this ; in fact, the USSR and the CPI top their list of untouchability.

Where then should we go for allies to support our case in the UN or act as a deterrent against intervention by the US Seventh Fleet or the Chinese Red Army ? These are facts of recent history that cannot be forgotten.

Even their minor aberrations, like known pro-Israel and anti-Arab stand, make of JP and his allies an impossible liability to our foreign policy as well as domestic economy. One can imagine what would happen to the country and its development programmes without Arab petroleum and petro-dollars, which we are getting on the easiest possible terms because of our enlightened foreign policy.

We now come to the economic crisis. Here also I believe the Prime Minister has all the advantages over JP, if only her Government desires to tackle the problems in a competent and effective way. The plain fact is that the will to do so got eroded

in the euphoria resulting from a massive electoral victory before the liberation of Bangladesh and defeat of Pakistan.

This complacency was cleverly exploited by the industrial monopolists as well as the kulak-trader class to scuttle the Indira Government's "Garibi Hatao" programmes. It is this elitist, big-moneyed class and the parties and leaders representing them who today constitute JP's main backing. That is the paradox of the JP agitation as well as the dilemma which mocks it.

So far as the Indira Government and Congress are concerned, this euphoria has now been dispelled, thanks mainly to JP's contribution in carrying dissent deep down to the masses. Today both the Indira Government and the Congress are wide awake to the economic imperatives. The Narora spirit has revived some, if not all, of the great expectations of the 1969-71 years.

The Prime Minister has the programme as well as the machinery to successfully implement priorities like a sound public distribution system to ensure the necessities of life to the people at prices within their means ; and now that concrete, visible performance has become an imperative for the survival of her Government and party, she will be forced to do so.

Developments like the replacement of the Kulak-minded Vasantrao Naik by Shankarrao Chavan, a leader committed to the Narora programme, and the restoration of their beloved Sheikh Abdullah to the people of Kashmir which are bound to be followed by similar changes in the sister States and may be the Centre itself show that healthy new winds are blowing again.

Even *The Indian Express*, a staunch JP supporter, had to admit that 'the Congress will meet most of JP's demands without giving him credit.'<sup>11</sup> Kuldip Nayar, the paper's Editor of News at the Capital, listed the appointment of an Ombudsman-type Lokpal to look into charges of corruption against ministers and officials, and drastic educational and

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11. March 15, 1975.

electoral reforms about to be introduced by the Government at Congress behest.

JP certainly takes the credit due to him for unleashing these winds of change, and we give it to him in ample measure; but I repeat that Indira Gandhi alone has the capacity and the machinery to implement a crash programme.

Even supposing the Government is ousted tomorrow or the day after, and the Opposition front under JP assumes power, it would take the latter months, if not years, to settle its ideological differences, thrash out a common programme and reorganise the Governmental and administrative machinery to implement it.

What then are our hungry, impoverished people to do in this long meantime of dislocation, maybe anarchy? Will the change help them secure a little more food and daily necessities at lower prices? Will it help them lead a better and fuller life? Can inflation and its brood of evils be curbed by JP's charisma? Or will the unsettled conditions lead to higher prices and more miseries for the people?

The answers should be self-evident from the political philosophy and ideology of JP's following. Can opposites like the Jana Sangh, the SSP and the Cong-O ever agree to a common policy or programme? Already they are at loggerheads over the electoral reforms recommended by the Tarkunde Committee. In sensitive Kashmir we find JP hailing Abdullah's return, while the Jana Sangh, his main supporter, was organising marches and riots against the settlement. They cannot even agree to the joint presentation of a common purse to their Lok Nayak. Nor can they evolve anything resembling a common programme because of fundamental ideological differences over basic problems like monopoly capitalism and landlordism, the father and mother of all the corruption and mal-administration that bedevils the land.

Inescapable, therefore, is the question: what then has brought these contradictory parties, ideologies and leaders together on a common platform under JP's leadership? Nothing

other than the sick old "Indira-Hatao" slogan of the 1971 elections. As the Prime Minister quipped to this writer, she is not sure whether it was the defeated and discredited Grand Alliance that had now jumped on to JP's bandwagon or whether JP had taken over the driver's seat.

We who have followed the chronology of the JP movement with considerable interest—we are bound to since we brought him out of his self-imposed wilderness—must say on his behalf that he was largely the victim of a body-trap set for him by parties concerned. His passion for his beloved Bihar and compassion for the wretched people's torments under the Gafoor regime misled JP to sacrifice his Gandhian role of a moral crusader to power-politics to save Bihar. For him this was a tragedy of good intentions.

We are not alone in making this charge. We know that the only living disciple of Gandhiji, Vinoba Bhave, shares it. Indeed, JP's ill-advised plunge into politics of parties and power has all but destroyed the Sarvodaya movement.

All that would have been excuseable—after all, it is part of the game of politics—but for the fact that JP has permitted his bandwagon-riders to soil even that game, shoddy as it always has been, with what looks like a swindle on the electorate.

A careful reading of the previous chapters will show that the emergence of the so-called Janta—that is, people's—candidates is in fact a device to present to the voters the same old party candidates, stripped of their party suits, in the garb of JP's charisma. The Jana Sangh President, J K Advani, described this as an "institutionalised arrangement". Really, it is nothing more than institutionalised fraud.

Take the latest example, in the recent by-elections from Bhopal, Babulal Gaur, a Jana Sangh candidate, was put up as a Janta candidate, but he continues to own allegiance to Jana Sangh and follow its whip. Similarly, Choudhri Devi Lal, a chronic defector of the Ayaram-Gayaram brigade, was put up for the Haryana legislature as a Janta candidate only to return to the party fold after the elections.

Such an arrangement would have been proper and legitimate had the parties concerned responded to JP's call and merged into a Janta Party, but they have refused to do so; and as the situation exists today, the development is only a masked fraud on the voters with party candidates hiding their party identity under the partyless mask of Janta.

So to sum up: instead of riding the nation of corrupt party politics with the Gandhian concept of partyless democracy, JP has only succeeded in making the corruption more confounded with party candidates masquerading under a non-party camouflage.

We would a thousand times rather have the more honest, if no less corrupt, alternative of the Congress or, preferably, a Congress-Communist alignment, or, even more ideally, a Congress-Communist-Marxist front, than old Grand Alliance of Reaction wearing the JP or Janta mask. Despite disenchantment, even disgust with the Ruling Party's defaults, the voters cannot be bamboozled by this kind of a masquerade.

A public man is known by the company he keeps. In the context of this adage, which we constantly hear being used against Jayaprakash Narayan, it is necessary to state several truths:

JP is *not* corrupt.  
JP is *not* reactionary.  
JP is *not* fascist.  
JP is *not* pro-capitalist.  
JP is *not* pro-kulak.  
JP is *not* after power of Prime Ministership.  
JP is *not* an American agent.

And yet, each and every one of these evil broods have jumped on the bandwagon of JP's "total revolution" with the result that his movement has got tarnished by the devilry of all the seven deadly devils of national and international reaction.

This becomes evident as we pursue and analyse the evolution of the JP agitation in its chronological order.



The Bihar stir was started by students in February 1974 as a non-political agitation for educational reforms and a fight against corruption. But on March 18, after JP had assumed the leadership of the movement, the gherao of the Bihar Assembly which led to large-scale loot and arson in Patna, for the first time brought to the surface the political undertones of the movement.

The main slogan of the gheraoists was "Gujarat victory is our victory! It's now the turn of Bihar!" Thus, it was becoming dimly clear in those early days that the agitation was following the Gujarat precedent and pattern; and with this the anti-corruption content of the movement was gradually being thrown over-board.

JP called for the observance of a "Sadachar Week" from May 16 to 22, 1974. In fairness to him, it must be noted that he wrote in an article that "sons and daughters of corrupt persons, including ministers, officials, businessmen and big farmer-hoarders will observe 12-hour fast in their homes to impress upon their elders their opposition to corruption".<sup>12</sup>

That was well said, but nothing more was done or even attempted in the direction of exposing corruption, blackmarketing and hoarding, though these aims had been proclaimed from house tops.

At any rate, nothing much was heard by the people till JP himself confessed at Sarnath (UP), on last Christmas day, that his student volunteers themselves had been indulging in corruption. He bemoaned that there was "no trace of money", even though Rs 18 lakhs out of Rs 27 lakhs worth coupons for funds in support of the agitation had been encashed. Even *The Hindustan Times*, a JP supporter, was compelled to write an editorial under the caption "introspection on revolution" which stated:

Mr Jayaprakash Narayan did well to utter some harsh home truths about the movement being conducted in his name in Bihar, UP, and elsewhere. In fact, he announced

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12. *Everyman's*, April 27, 1974

the temporary suspension of the Jana and Chhatra Sangarsh Samitis in Bihar to enable the leadership to cleanse it of corrupt elements that have infiltrated the Action Committees and indulged in such misdeeds as embezzlement of funds and their unauthorised collection through dubious means.”<sup>13</sup>

The editorial concluded by noting “the need for greater emphasis on the socio-economic aspects of his movement”. Nothing was heard about this episode, however; though later JP somewhat retracted from his confession on the embezzlement by his revolutionaries.

Naturally and inevitably, with the moral and socio-economic content of the movement getting dimmer, the dismissal of the Bihar Ministry and dissolution of the Bihar Assembly emerged as the sole demand of the JP agitation. It then was soon realised that “student power”, however much one might admire it, was not capable of winning these political demands.

The students, in fact, rejected JP’s call for the boycott of classes for a year in the name of “total revolution.” So he was forced to politicalise his hitherto moral crusade. We read now JP telling *The Hindustan Times* :

“I am trying to raise these issues (dismissal of the Ministry and dissolution of the four opposition parties). Personally, I am trying to put in as much socio-economic content into the movement as possible. So far they are accepting it. So, as time goes on, in cooperation with these parties, I hope to deepen the socio-economic content of the movement.”<sup>14</sup>

And yet, JP had to admit:

“Two of these parties are conservative (though the Jana Sangh resents this appellation of conservatism), and I do not know about the Congress-O, which claims it is Socialist (though I do not know how far they would go). But it is not wise to spell out everything at this stage. As time goes on, and the movement gets more and more radicalised, as it goes nearer

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13. December 27, 1974

14. August 26, 1974

and nearer to the people, these questions will be raised, and, may be, these parties themselves will be radicalised.”

The same idea of purifying the conservative parties was expressed by JP in his interview to *Blitz*<sup>15</sup> when he asserted that “as a result of the present wave of mass awakening, a new compulsive force has been created,” and evoked the two new forces of “Jana Shakti and Yuva Shakti” to say that “all the old ways of political and social analysis will have to change in order to take into account the working of the two new forces.”

Any sober analysis of his interviews to *The Hindustan Times* and *Blitz* would show that all this was wishful thinking, hoping against hope for a miracle that would transform reaction into radicalism. As if fragments of the old, decaying alliance of reaction against Indira Gandhi that had reorganised themselves under JP’s leadership could ever lead a socio-economic revolution against the existing corruption and maladministration! But JP believed that this was possible; and nobody can doubt his honesty however misplaced it was.

Nevertheless, even after the rightist political parties had been drawn into the Bihar movement, JP was no nearer to the goal. Worse, all those parties got split on the issue of dissolution of the Assembly, even the Jana Sangh, which by then had come nearest to JP,

JP despaired; so much so that on October 10, 1974, on the conclusion of a three-day “Bihar Bandh”, he said at a public meeting in Patna that “sometime I also think that when these MLAs are so shameless, what is left for the people to do but to go to their houses and bring them out without touching any member of their families—and tell them that they have to go.”

This directive of JP was published in his *Everyman’s*.<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, JP even sanctioned the slapping of MLAs who refused to resign. This created such a furore in the winter session of the Rajya Sabha that he had to back out with an explanation that he had said it more in a joke.

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15. February 1, 1975

16. October 12, 1974

As JP went headlong into the clutches of the Grand Alliance parties, he made virulent anti-CPI and even anti-Soviet pronouncements. He told that the "Communists are not only conservative, but are also reactionary. The Russian state is conservative. Compared to it, China is still a revolutionary state."<sup>17</sup>

Thus Mao, who had incurred JP's wrath while he was the Vice-President of the pro-American Congress for Cultural Freedom, was reassessed and certified as a great revolutionary. The witch-hunt of Krishna Menon by the JP-men in the wake of the Chinese aggression was clean forgotten.

These somersaults perhaps provide a clue to JP's international outlook; they need passing mention because they cannot but have a bearing on India's foreign policy if and when he is called upon to formulate one following the success of his "total revolution."

To return to Bihar, in course of months, this wretched state had evolved into a staging post for all-India ventures. At a press conference in Patna on October 20, 1974, JP said: "Let them (Bihar MPs) also remember that it will be a long-drawn-out battle, and will not end until its immediate and distant aims are achieved"—that is, we suppose, the conquest of Patna as well as New Delhi.

Addressing a gathering organised by Punjab's opposition parties (the Akalis and the Jana Sangh), at Ludhiana on October 29, 1974, JP declared that 20 lakhs of people would have to squat before Parliament House and prevent any one from leaving till their demands were conceded.

Meanwhile, JP was also getting personally bitter against the Prime Minister. At Ludhiana, he called her an "exceedingly vindictive person." Referring to her charge that JP was trying to destroy democratic institutions like the elected Bihar Assembly, he asserted that she was no democrat, "but a dictator masquerading as a democrat."

The drift towards the Rightist opposition parties reached its culmination with the setting up of the National Coordination

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17. *The Statesman*, June 16, 1974

Committee at Delhi on November 25, 1974. Apart from the political taint from such associations, the anti-corruption face of the JP movement had by now got completely tarnished. In fact the Opposition leader had begun, wittingly or unwittingly, to keep company with "some known corrupt people", to quote the Prime Minister's words to *Blitz*.

In the early stage of the Bihar stir, JP was closely associated with two stalwarts in the state, former Chief Minister Mahamaya Prasad Sinha and Karpuri Thakur. Sinha had received strictures from the Calcutta High Court for withdrawing cases, while he was the Chief Minister of the United Front Government in Bihar, against the notorious Raja of Ramgarh.

Karpuri Thakur, a chela of Raj Narain, was blasted by the Mudholkar Commission for impropriety while he was the Chief Minister. The Karpuri-Mahamaya Prasad association with JP, thankfully, was not then that well known in the country as a whole.

But after the National Coordination Committee was set up in Delhi, in November last year, JP was seen with corrupt men known as such all over India. Besides Ramnath Goenka, they included Biju Patnaik, Prakash Singh Badal, Gayatri Devi, Karunanidhi and the like.

Badal, who is facing an Inquiry Commission, presented JP with a purse of Rs 73,000 at the Ludhiana meeting on October 29, 1974. It is this bandwagon that gave the Prime Minister her opportunity to quip on JP's selective smear campaign.

About this time, a section in the Congress Party, extremely sympathetic to JP, evolved a formula to bring the Opposition leader and the Prime Minister together. The talk took place in Delhi on November 1, 1974. Jagjivan Ram, also, was associated with the meeting. It broke down on the question of the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly, leaving both the leaders in a mood of bitter personal hostility.

The Prime Minister's frustration found eloquent and somewhat explosive expression in her December 1974 interview to *Blitz*. Almost simultaneously JP mounted a series of personal

denunciations against the Prime Minister. These finally shut the doors to any hope of a dialogue, still less a reconciliation.

On November 2, Indira Gandhi delivered a spirited speech in Delhi challenging JP to wait till the normal election to test out his strength. On November 19, JP accepted the Prime Minister's challenge. At a Patna rally, he said: "I will take a position in the battlefield, not as a candidate, but as a leader."

In the electoral exercise, "forced on us", as JP put it, there would be only two contestants—the people, the students, and the opposition parties, who support the Bihar movement, on one side, and the Congress-CPI alignment on the other.

Thus the JP revolution, which was launched as a clean non-party national crusade against corruption and maladministration, succumbed to the very evils of the politics which it had sought to fight and destroy. Worse still, JP found himself aligned with reactionary parties, while the Prime Minister could at least claim to lead progressive Congress and Communist forces. These two factors put the Sarvodaya leader at a total disadvantage in the context of his own claims to leading a "total revolution."

Since then, JP has been moving fast down the slippery slope to reaction and counter-revolution, in the course of which he began an extraordinary exercise of revising—and disowning almost his entire past—a past, by the way of which any leader should have been justly proud.

During his Gujarat tour in January, he confessed at a public rally that he was wrong in supporting Pandit Nehru against Sardar Patel. It is well known that during and after freedom struggle, JP was with Nehru and totally opposed to Patel. After Gandhiji's assassination, he had lambasted the RSS, and Patel for his support to that organisation. He had even demanded the resignation of Patel. JP's anti-RSS position had been fully brought out in the Kapur Commission Report.

But once he revised his position vis-a-vis the Nehru-Patel tussle, the next logical step for him was to give a good conduct

certificate to the RSS itself, which he did in Delhi on February 16. He strongly condemned the move to ban the RSS, and said that its very name suggested that it was a body of volunteers in the service of the country.

Politics is a dirty game even for a man of JP's record and integrity, but surely the Gandhian leader could have avoided such an obvious *volte face* on everything that his Mahatma had stood for, fought for, even sacrificed his life to bullets coming from the same kind of political-communal quarter that he was now praising.

After that, JP became the lost leader to those of us who had stupendous faith in his moral if not political stature as well as strategy. It came as no surprise to us, therefore, to find the great incorruptible seeking to divide a corrupted Congress and even calling Jagjivan Ram and Yeshwantrao Chavan to come and speak up because "there is nothing to fear, as there is no Indira-wave sweeping the country."

This was power politics at its worst. From January 1975 onwards, JP's attempts to split the Congress Party and put some of its stalwarts against Indira Gandhi have become transparent. The Prime Minister exposed them at Madras in February 1975, and then in the Rajya Sabha more recently.

I do not suggest that an Opposition leader had no right to divide the Ruling Party, but where was JP's conscience in the context of his crusade against corruption when he showed readiness to make common cause with corrupt Congressmen against Indira Gandhi? If she is a devil to JP, are these men any less corrupt? Surely JP knows better.

And so to JP's very latest—the call to the armed forces and the constabulary not to obey orders from the Government. Though he later tried to wriggle out of this explosive climax of his agitation, it certainly presents an intriguing development in the light of recent campaign launched by his old friend Minoo Masani and the American lobby in the country.

JP may politically be justified in fomenting a mutiny within the Congress Party even though its morality is open to question. But the nation's security forces constitute too sensitive and explosive an issue to play politics with. The Prime Minister has in the past drawn parallels between Allende's Chile and Indira's India which the Opposition has dismissed as a bogey. Bogey or reality, does JP want to provide it with such explosive content by way of proof?

With Dr Kissinger enacting Satan's own role of scuttle around us, such loose talk can be dangerous to the country and its security. □



# 7

## *JP's Marching Order*

ON June 12, Mr Justice Jag Mohan Lal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court held Mrs Gandhi's election to the Lok Sabha invalid on two technical grounds. Mr Jayaprakash Narayan and his newly forged Grand Alliance pounced upon it to mount a nationwide campaign for her immediate resignation, though Mr Justice Sinha himself had simultaneously stayed the operation of his verdict till the Supreme Court was seized of the matter.

On June 24, Mr Justice Krishna Iyer, the Supreme Court vacation judge, after hearing Mrs Gandhi's appeal, gave her a conditional stay while concurrently ruling that, pending the final disposal of her petition; she could continue as the Prime Minister with all the rights intact, barring the right to vote. The order further stated that Mrs Gandhi could also approach a division bench of the Supreme Court for getting the non-voting disability waived.

Totally disregarding such a clear injunction, the JP combine started plotting her immediate ouster. A joint meeting of the executive committees of the five rightist opposition parties, with JP participating in the proceedings throughout, adopted a resolution calling upon Mrs Gandhi either to quit or be faced with a countrywide movement with no holds barred.

On June 25, Mr Jayaprakash Narayan addressed an evening rally at Delhi's Ramlila grounds and gave the marching order

to the foot soldiers of right reaction. The phalanx comprised the Jana Sangh, Cong-O, Bhartiya Lok Dal, Akalis and the Socialist Party. In his 90-minute speech, he elaborated a programme of extra-Constitutional action for the decimation of the Indira government. The following are the seven important points that stand out of his fighting speech, as reported in a national daily.<sup>1</sup>

“Mr Narayan called upon the army, police and government employees not to obey any order they consider illegal. The Army Act lays down that the armed forces must protect the democratic Constitution. The army must oppose unconstitutional changes in the Constitution.”

“He urged the people to gherao the Information & Broadcasting Minister for allowing All India Radio to do personal propaganda for Mrs Gandhi. ‘Is is not possible, he angrily asked, ‘for the people to challenge the partisan policy of AIR and take steps to paralyse its functioning until it changed its policy?’ JP appreciated that ‘at least the Jana Sangh had held a protest demonstration outside AIR’.”

“People should be prepared ‘not to cooperate with the government and refuse to pay tax.’ The consequences, he warned, would be serious and ‘you must be prepared for it’.”

“Narayan appealed to the students to be prepared to walk out of classes and walk into jail.”

“He urged the Chief Justice of India, Mr A N Ray, not to sit on the division bench of the Supreme Court that would hear Mrs Gandbi’s appeal against the judgment of the Allahabad High Court. He added that it would not be in his personal interest and in the interest of justice since Mr Justice Ray ‘is obliged to the Prime Minister for appointing him’.”

“Mr Justice Krishna Iyer had made it clear in his order that the Prime Minister’s office was not in dispute. But then he

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1. *The Hindustan Times*, June 26, 1975

decreed that she could continue as the Prime Minister. 'It would have been better that he had not said so'."

"JP urged Mr Jagjivan Ram and Mr Y B Chavan to come out in the open and say that Mrs Gandhi should step down."

Yes, the gauntlet had been thrown. An unflappable Mrs Gandhi picked it up and promptly advised the President to declare a state of national emergency in India, which was enforced that very night, on June 25.

# 8

## *Indira on Emergency*

“Neither the spirit of our Constitution nor its essential characteristics can change”. The Prime Minister declared categorically and most emphatically in an exclusive *Blitz*<sup>1</sup> interview which should put an end to funeral orations on the “demise” of Indian democracy by foreign and domestic mourners.

This forthright assurance came in answer to my question on reports that her Government was “taking a second look at the Constitution, and even considering a new Constituent Assembly for the purpose.”

Indira Gandhi continued, raising her voice in defence of the political system adopted by India. “I am not thinking in terms of either a Constituent Assembly or a new Constitution. A second look does not mean an alternative Constitution.

“We cannot but be a democracy, a secular democracy and a democracy striving steadily to enlarge its socialist content. The importance of representative institutions, or the place of Parliament cannot change either. Nor can there be any fundamental departure in the scheme of Centre-State relations which our founding fathers devised to serve the needs of a country of our vast diversity.

“But”—she warned—“We can and should have a look at provisions and procedures we have to give effect to the adopted

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<sup>1</sup> August 23, 1975

objectives of the Constitution. Many of these procedures and provisions have in effect worked against the Constitution and given enormous scope for small obstructive groups to create trouble and engineer crises."

The PM invited lawyers, political scientists, leaders of the intellectual world "earnestly to study the problems that have come up and give us suggestions."

While agreeing that "force has not been used at all, not even in a small way anywhere" during the Emergency, the PM repudiated the suggestion that she had "over-reacted" to the national crisis.

"Some people had gone underground earlier, others went afterwards; and they are continuing their preparations," she explained. "So it is easy now to say that I over-reacted, but I don't think we had very much choice . . . They did want to enact on a national scale the type of paralysing of Government and disruption of public order which they had attempted on two States previously, and also this time it would have been accompanied by far greater violence."

Mrs Gandhi believes that the 20-point Emergency Programme, announced on July 1, is going to be implemented, unlike its predecessors and to guarantee this, she invites the whole public to act like a "Watch-Dog Committee" to help the official machinery in its execution.

She assured that "a large number of arrested people of various categories have been released," and that "the process is going on." "There have also been cases of wrong arrest," she admitted, "but as soon as we discover them we move in the matter."

When I drew her attention to reports that the Emergency was used by some of her State Ministers to put behind bars personal opponents like people who had charged them with corruption, smuggling etc, she promised immediate investigation and action. "You should let us know at once. You should let the State level know and also the Centre. Where we found something was wrong we have intervened."

The PM considers any move towards a national reconciliation premature.

When we suggested that Jayaprakash Narayan can be persuaded to withdraw his movement altogether, she asked: "Is he solely in charge now? What about the other people who are involved? I think we have to study the situation a little more before we make any move, because I very much doubt whether the Opposition front has given up its stand."

She added: "Our information is that the gentleman who was put in charge of the programme for this campaign is still at large and he keeps announcing what things will be done and so on and so forth. And the foreign press, also, picks up and exaggerates it out of all proportion."

"Still the discussions, if any discussions are to be held, should be meaningful, but unfortunately a lot of foreign people are taking an interest in this matter which does not help the situation," she concluded.

The PM fully backed my plea that pre-censorship should be replaced by self-censorship under a Press Advisory system organised with the cooperation and participation of editors and journalists.

According to her, the Law Ministry was considering a Statute to take over the properties illegally acquired by black-marketeers and blackmoney kings.

**Q :** Madam Prime Minister, you have been saying that we shall never return to the pre-Emergency days of Licentiousness and political permissiveness. On the other hand, you are thinking in terms of a stable political system in which there will have to be a healthy balance between the political rights of the individuals and the economic rights of the millions. Could you give us some idea of the new political system you have in mind?

**A :** I do not know what you mean by "*new political system*". I think we have a perfectly good system which took us many years to build. The problem arose because that

system was not being worked properly. As I have said in public, all sides have to abide by the rules of the game. You can't just say Government should do this or that, but the Opposition is free to do what it likes. Besides, in our country, there are groups who have no faith in parliamentary democracy. Other groups have no faith in secularism, socialism or non-alignment.

The months just preceding the Emergency can hardly be called normal. It is only now that the ordinary citizen can go about his business without disturbance. All the time there were these demonstrations. Only a minority were involved in them, but they were interfering with the lives of a much larger number of people not only by direct strikes but by sometimes the effects of a strike or a hartal. Certain people insisted that grains should not be sold and so on. The crisis, therefore, was building up for quite some time. Our main effort now is to resolve that crisis.

**Q :** That means you want to do away with the *abuses* of democracy ?

**A :** Yes, we want to do away with the abuses. The abuses are not in democracy, but only in its working. There were parties and individuals here who did not accept the obligations and responsibilities which go along with the rights which democracy gives them. After all, the test of any system is that it should work. There has to be, as I said, in any society of today, a healthy balance between the political and other rights of individuals and the economic rights of individuals and the economic rights of millions of people ; but this balance can only be attained by everybody accepting certain codes of conduct.

**Q :** How do you propose to bring about change in the thinking of our democracy ?

**A :** Some sense of responsibility has come up of its own, as you probably would have noticed. I think that many who were indulging in indisciplined acts — I am not talking about the committed cadres of some parties but the general

public as such — now they realise how much better it is for them if work goes on in a normal way and we devote ourselves to the priorities of the nation.

**Q :** I believe some of the gentlemen behind the bars also do realise this fact now ?

**A :** I hope so. I don't know yet.

**Q :** It has been authoritatively stated that the Government is taking a second look at the Constitution. Along what lines are these changes contemplated ? Are you considering a new Constituent Assembly for the purpose ?

**A :** I don't know what you mean by "authoritatively"?

**Q :** By Government members.

**A :** I am not thinking in terms of a Constituent Assembly or a new Constitution. A second look does not mean an alternative Constitution.

Neither the spirit of our Constitution nor its essential characteristics can change. We cannot but be a democracy, a secular democracy and democracy striving steadily to enlarge its socialist content. The importance of representative institutions or the place of Parliament cannot change either. Nor can there be any fundamental departure in the scheme of Centre-State relations which our founding fathers devised to serve the needs of a country of our vast diversity.

But we can and should have a look at the provisions and procedures if we have to give effect to the adopted objectives of the Constitution. Many of these procedures and provisions have in effect worked against the Constitution and given enormous scope for small obstructive groups to create trouble and engineer crisis.

I want lawyers, political scientists, leaders of the intellectual world earnestly to study the problems that have come up and give us suggestions.



**Q :** There were two developments. One was the abuse of democracy and the Constitution by the Opposition. The other was that you were not able to put through radical changes under the old system. Somehow things got mixed up.

**A :** Things got mixed up for a number of reasons. I don't think it is merely the Constitution which came in the way. A lot of confusion was created in people's thinking by people who misled them and by arguments and threats which had nothing to do with the basic question.

One thing I would like to make clear is that the spirit of the Constitution and its essential characteristics are still very valid and necessary. We would not like them to change. I realise the importance of representative institutions in our country. Nor can there be any fundamental departure in the scheme of Centre-State relations because we have to see, in a country of this vast dimension and vast diversity, how to keep it together and how to have a system which is flexible enough to keep it together.

**Q :** That will include plurality of parties, I suppose ?

**A :** I would think so.

**Q :** The country has been quiet since the declaration of the state of Emergency. There was no occasion to use force in a big way anywhere. Does this mean that the threat from the Rightist conglomerate has ceased or is fading ? Or can there have been any over-reaction on your part on the eve of June 26, as some intellectual circles in the country, not necessarily hostile to you, have been saying ?

**A :** So far as I know, force has not been used at all, not even in a small way anywhere. If the country is quiet, it is mainly due to the fact that trouble-makers were denied the means to whip up popular feelings through misrepresentation and maligning or misleading the people. The people have welcomed the restoration of order and confidence.

Some people had gone underground earlier, others went underground afterwards ; and they are continuing their preparations. There is a growing build-up in the media, as you yourself have noticed in some foreign countries.

So it is easy now to say that I over-reacted, but if read what the press was saying and the direction towards which various leaders of the Morcha seemed to be leading, I don't think we had very much choice. They did want to enact on a national scale the type of paralysis of governmental work and disruption of public order which they had attempted in two States previously. And this time, it would have been accompanied by far greater violence also.

**Q :** Are you referring to Jayaprakash's call to the Army and that kind of thing ?

**A :** Well, that *plus* the fact that whenever there has been any demonstration by these groups there has been violence, even though the main leader or leaders may not want it. But the trouble is that they align themselves with and they give shelter to groups which openly believe in violence. It is easy for them to say ; "Well, so and so has said this, but we do not subscribe to his views on non-violence !"

**Q :** Your 20-Point Programme, announced on July 1, has been widely welcomed. But similar programmes had been there before also — the Narora programme, for instance. What is the guarantee that the present one, unlike its predecessors, will be implemented?

**A :** We are trying harder, and there is a new spirit of discipline and morale. Just the fact that something has not been done earlier is really no argument for saying that it will not be done in future. We have begun doing things in right earnest.

**Q :** Here, probably, going to the people on the basis of a Constituent Assembly would have shaken up the nation and created a new dynamics, something which we lack. That is why I asked the question about the Constituent Assembly.

A : Actually, whatever you do, it will be a mixture of good and bad. I mean nothing you do is perfect. And I think that your suggestion regarding a Constituent Assembly would create, also, many problems. It might solve some problems, but it would certainly create many new ones.

Q : The agrarian part of the 20-Point Programme, which deals with the enforcement of land ceiling, distribution of surplus land and house-sites, abolition of bonded labour, mitigation of rural indebtedness, and fixation of minimum wages of agricultural labour, implies a veritable rural revolution; but a revolution requires an effective *agency*. What is the *agency* which will implement this project?

A : This programme involves the entire Central Government, the State Governments, the bureaucracy as well as every agency which the Government has. I don't think that there can be any new *official* agency. We do want, however, and are trying, to have far greater people's involvement, popular participation.

This has been discussed in the Working Committee, it has been discussed with the Chief Ministers; and I think that a beginning has been made. We are following up each item. For instance, the Chief Ministers are coming here on Monday (August 18) specially to discuss the question of rural credit and allied matters.

Q : Are you contemplating some kind of watch-dog committees at the popular level?

A : Well, there will have to be perhaps some such committees, but this cannot be done suddenly. We want to create an atmosphere where the whole public provides a watch-dog committee.

Q : And gets involved, committed...

A : And gets involved, committed, also, in what is happening. It is only a neighbour who knows what is happening. The people of the village, whether they are officials or the local people, know what are the wrongs, what has to be

righted, or what is being done well. They make the best watch-dog committees.

**Q :** It will need some machinery.

**A :** Whatever machinery you create, unless you have this kind of atmosphere, it degenerates. If there is this kind of atmosphere, then the existing machinery, also, knowing that it is being watched, works with a new dedication. That is what we are hoping and planning for.

**Q :** This question arose because the Congress Party, ideologically and politically, is unequipped for such an assignment. There are too many lobbies representing vested interests like landlords, industrialists and trading classes. It has been dragging its feet on very many crucial occasions. Recently your Party had to expel even some of its Members of Parliament. What is being done to shake up the party and give it a new orientation?

**A :** It is largely the slant given by some sections of the press which creates these conflicts and tensions. Conflicts and tensions are there ; and they are not only in our party, but in every party anywhere in the world.

The Congress does have landlords, industrialists and traders, but it has, also, a large number of industrial workers, artisans, kisans, landless labourers, teachers, lawyers, doctors. I mean, we have all sections; and this is the strength of the Congress that it has been so broad-based. There are conflicts and there are obstructions, but I think we just have to meet the situation. Even parties which are much more rigid and much more careful about their membership have internal conflicts. Perhaps we don't hear so much about them because they are not discussed.

So far as expulsion of Congress MPs or those who have created that sort of trouble are concerned, they are very very small in number and they have been dealt with. The Congress President and many of our MPs and MLAs are presently exerting themselves with vigour to help in the implementation of the 20-Point Programme.

Q : Still some sort of scrutiny will be necessary, may be directly under your supervision.

A : As I said, we are planning that there should be some such representative groups.

Q : So, this is being seriously considered : on the one side, scrutiny; and on the other side, popular participation.

A : (Interrupting) Yes, but nobody should feel everybody is watching everybody else, I mean. That would be counter-productive.

Q : I hope you are considering the land army project and things like that, now that you have all the powers.

A : Well, I am afraid I don't really have all the powers. That is a misconception. The business of the Government goes on more or less in the same way.

Q : The very fact that the Emergency has brought up two defaults of our system — one, the Opposition's intransigence, and the other, the failure of the Government to put across its plans and programmes — indicates the need for changes.

A : I don't know whether it really was a failure in the matter of putting across the programmes, because the economic difficulties which our country faced were certainly not of the Government's making. There was a run of bad luck which gave the opportunity to the Opposition to exploit the people's difficulties and their understandable dissatisfaction and irritation.

Q : There is still a lot of irritation because of continuing inflation. The fall in prices has not reached down to the housewife. What can be done?

A : I think that the prices of most things have fallen.

Q : Some are going up — wheat, sugar, pulses, edible oils, everything is costlier in Bombay.

A : It may be so in Bombay, but in most parts of the

country they are not going up. Partly, of course, the prices go up in the rainy season, but some traders may also increase them.

Q : Traders have to be taught a lesson.

A : In this matter, this consumer movement and the participation of youths can do a great deal.

Q : There was a consumer movement in Bombay which ended with your condemnation of the ladies' committee organised by Mrinal Gore and others.

A : That was not a genuine movement.

Q : It started as one.

A : It might have, but it turned into something else.

Q : What kind of a consumer movement would you like to have?

A : A consumer movement, where the people try to study why the price has risen, and then organise themselves to rectify the reason. I have given an instance in one of my previous interviews to you.

In Delhi some years ago, long before I became Prime Minister, the price of sugar suddenly shot up just before the festival season when everybody buys sugar. There was a little shortage of sugar, but not to the extent that justified this rise in price. The housewives just said : "We will not buy sugar. It doesn't matter if it is the festival season, we are not going to buy sugar at this price." And the price fell.

There has been some confusion in Delhi at the milk booths. The other day I was meeting some writers and others. They told me how they got together and were able to see that there was much more effective distribution and some of the wrong things were corrected.

This is what I mean by a consumer movement. But when the situation is politicalised, the person who should be blamed is not blamed at all. The wrong-doer also joins in the general

clamour and begins saying that it is the Government's fault, although it is he who is putting up the price.

**Q :** So it should be consumer resistance directed against the trader?

**A :** Well, they have to find out what is wrong. There are certain articles of which prices go up for reasons beyond our control. For instance, petrol. Suppose the prices go up, you cannot help it. However much the consumer may dislike it, he just has to put up with it. In the rainy season, vegetables are in short supply and the price does go up a bit. You cannot do much about it. You can only see that it is better distributed.

**Q :** Exports too, come in the way. If only the exports were balanced with the needs of the people.

**A :** Don't you think that people should try to eat less of those items which need to be exported, so that we can import more of the items that are in greater demand?

**Q :** Well, our people have got themselves used to the barest minimum in the way of diet and that too, like the rice we get, is sometimes so dirty.

**A :** But the rice we are exporting is not what the poor people eat. It is only the very top quality Basmati that is exported.

**Q :** There should be better scrutiny over the ration shops and the public distribution system.

**A :** That is precisely what I mean — to see that the ration shops function properly.

**Q :** Since all the Chief Ministers are meeting here, you might impress this duty upon them.

**A :** I have done so and will do so again.

**Q :** The election to Parliament is scheduled for February-March next year. However, you said the other day that the

time was not ripe to fix a date for it, conditions being as they are. You said, also, on another occasion that there was no question of one-party rule in India. Do we take it that you will release the political prisoners, as distinct from those belonging to the banned para-military organisations, before the next election, as and when it takes place ?

A : It is too early to speak of the dates. Meantime, a large number of people of various categories have been released.

Q : People who were arrested ?

A : Yes, those who were arrested.

Q : So that process is going on ?

A : Yes, you see the lists were not made here at the Centre. It was largely left to the local people to decide who might create trouble. If we find that there is no such agitational approach, well, naturally, we do not want to keep people in prison for the sake of keeping them. There have been cases, also, I must admit, of wrong arrests. As soon as we discover them we move in the matter.

The majority of those who are detained today belong to the banned organisations, or are those known to be directly involved in planning or organising the agitation, of course, certain anti-social elements are there too. They are not all political prisoners.

Q : There are reports that the Emergency was used by some of your States' Ministers to put behind bars personal opponents like people who have charged them with corruption, smuggling, etc. How can such abuse of the Emergency be prevented ? Suppose I come across an incident, what do I do about it ?

A : You should let us know at once. You should let the State level know and also the Centre. I think most of the stories are grossly exaggerated.

Q : I am researching one of them.

A : Whenever we have received such complaints, we have



had them checked, and in many cases they have been proved wrong. As I said in answer to an earlier question, where we found something was wrong, we have intervened to set things right.

**Q :** As a newspaper editor with 40 years experience, I would strongly urge that it would be in the interest of all concerned if pre-censorship were replaced by self-censorship with a press advisory system organised with the cooperation and participation of editors and journalists. What is your reaction to this proposal ?

**A :** I entirely agree with you. In fact, this is what I have been saying for a long time that the press must exercise self-restraint. It is said that officials are unimaginative and over-zealous. Many journals, also, have been over-imaginative and just went beyond all limits.

**Q :** I was the first one to protest when they made all kinds of allegations at the time of Lalit Narayan Mishra's death. I could imagine what your sentiments were at that time, but now, I think, all the newspapers have learnt their lesson and I think we are wiser and sadder by what has happened because we have lost something very precious.

**A :** But even before they went to the extreme, many of them were not observing either the discipline of facts or any considerations of decency.

**Q :** All you have now to do is to set down the rules and regulations, appoint press advisers, get us to co-operate with them, and leave the rest to us. If we default, let the punishment be severe.

**A :** I think talks are going on with editors and journalists about this, but I don't know whether all of them still feel like you.

**Q :** Censorship to me is a matter of great personal humiliation. It is not necessary at all because we could do it on our own. Anyway, you say this matter is being considered.

A : We have been considering it from the beginning, but, as I said, the mood of the editors must be one of cooperation. Some of them know quite well that they were not acting as newspaper men, but really were almost guiding the Opposition.

Q : There has been widespread jubilation over the drive against black-marketeers and black money kings resting on their silver beds or bathing in their marble bathrooms ; but there is, yet, no Statute to acquire the huge properties they have illegally acquired. Why so, Madam ?

A : I think this matter is being looked into by the Law Ministry.

Q : Now that the agitation launched by Jayaprakash Narayan and his group has fizzled out, friendly quarters both here and abroad feel a move might be made towards a national reconciliation with the withdrawal of both the agitation and the spirit behind it. Would you welcome such a move by some responsible authority like Sheikh Abdullah ?

A : I think it is a little too early to say anything definite.

Q : Some petitions towards this end are going round. I would like you to take the lead in reviewing the situation.

A : Our information is that the gentleman who was put in charge of the programme for this campaign is still at large, and he keeps announcing what things will be done and so on and so forth. And the foreign press also picks it up and exaggerates it very much out of all proportion. I think it is a little too early. . .

Q : . . . to think in terms of national reconciliation ? But I believe Jayaprakash is willing.

A : I have no information at all. So it depends on what you mean by "reconciliation" because on previous occasions also, Jayaprakash Narayan has said that he had no objection to reconciliation, but at the same time he was carrying on his agitation, and he was not condemning the hate-campaign which was vitiating the atmosphere. The two things cannot go on together.

**Q :** Suppose he is induced to withdraw his movement altogether ?

**A :** Now, is he solely in charge ? What about other people who are involved ?

**Q :** He is supposed to be the leader.

**A :** I know, but I think we have to study the situation a little more before we make any move because I very much doubt whether the Opposition front has given up its stand.

**Q :** Well, their so-called total revolution has fizzled out. There has been no popular reaction. Leaders, I believe, stand completely isolated, whether they are in jail or are underground.

**A :** Still, one must feel that the discussions, if any discussions are to be held, are meaningful. Unfortunately, a lot of foreign people are taking an interest in this, which does not help the situation.

**Q :** I know there is a move to export resistance here, but that itself shows that domestic resistance has flopped. The very fact that somebody in London, or Washington, or Bonn is creating trouble for us . . .

**A :** (Interrupting) Without taking the least trouble to find out what the situation was or is ! Many of the western books which we used to read were always extolling the sense of fair-play of people abroad as opposed to the Orientals or Asiatics, as we were then called. But we find that in many of the foreign journals there is no fairplay at all. They are giving an entirely one-sided picture without bothering to see whether it has any connection whatsoever with facts.

And when our people write to them, they just do not print the letters on the ground that there is no space. Or they might just publish the mildest of the letters and they say they have represented the other point of view. All the letters they publish are against us.

**Q :** So what do you propose to do about this smear campaign ? As the movement fizzles out here, it seems to escalate abroad. Are you thinking in terms of setting up some public relations organisations, or inviting the newspapermen to this country ?

**A :** Well, those that were here were the ones that were misrepresenting us largely !

**Q :** Can't we do something about it ?

**A :** What do you suggest ? It is for our newspapermen to suggest something because earlier, when we found misrepresentations, we spoke to foreign correspondents. They said : "Well, we are only writing what your Indian correspondents have published." So I think that in this situation, Indian newspapermen could put their heads together. □

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