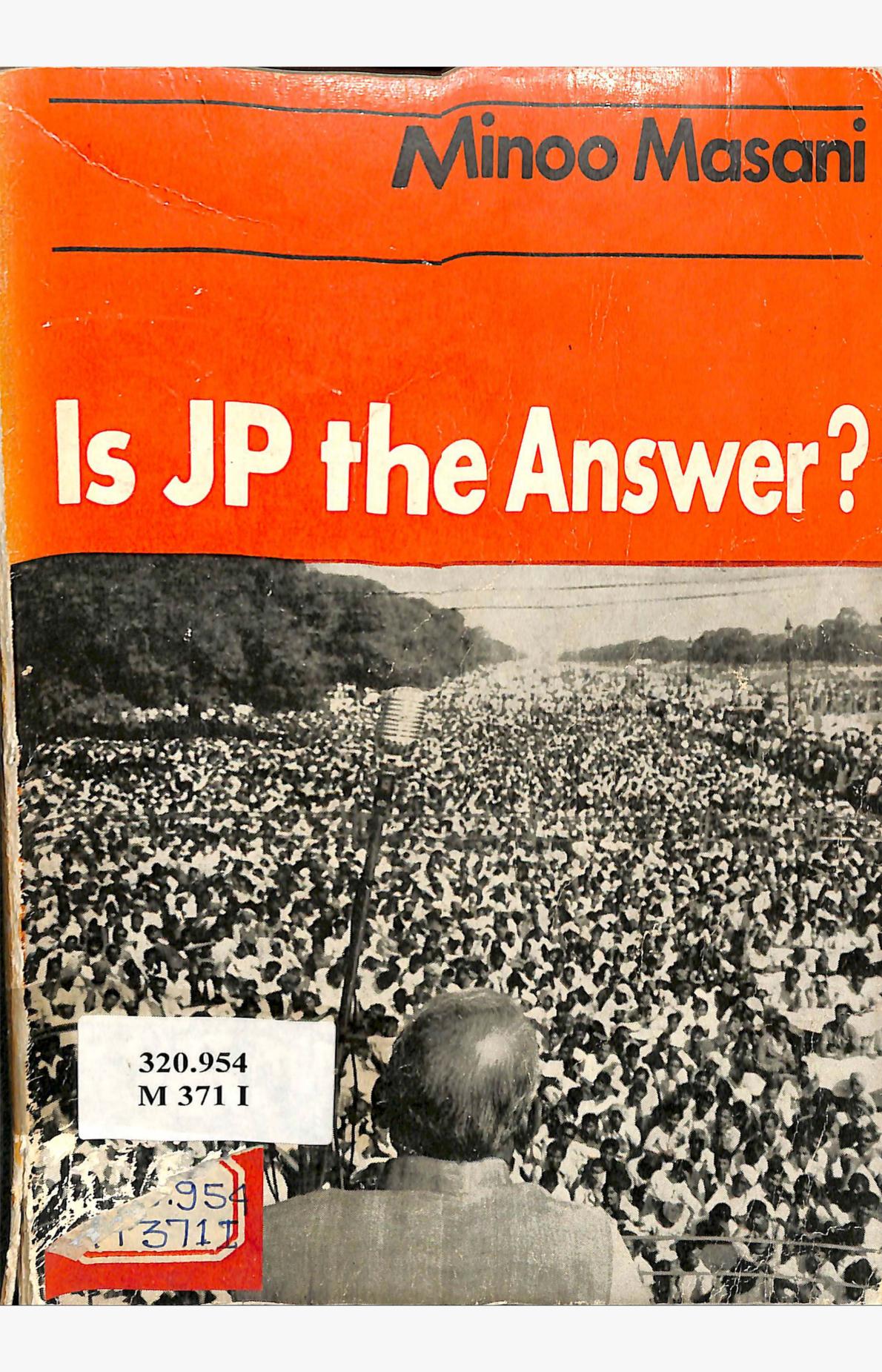


Minoo Masani

Is JP the Answer?



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IS J.P. THE ANSWER?

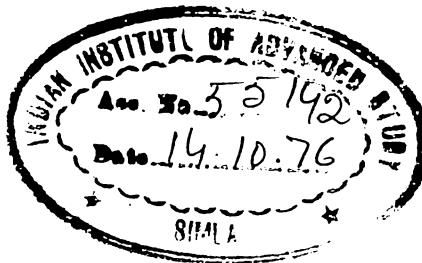
IS J.P. THE ANSWER?

MINOO MASANI

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To
The memory of
That great little lady

Prabhavati Devi

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1 *The Battle of Patna*

November 4, 1974, may well prove to be a major turning point in independent India's history.

What the capital of Bihar witnessed that day was a massive show of armed might never witnessed before even during the most repressive phases of the British raj. Thousands of policemen were deployed in the city and around it. All accesses to Patna were sealed and kept under the strictest surveillance. Trains, steamers and buses to the city were cancelled, virtually cutting off Patna from the rest of Bihar and India.

What was the colossal threat which the State and the Central government were trying to meet? Was an armed invasion from an alien power anticipated? Was civil war expected to break out? Was it felt that insurgents, traitors and enemies of the State would attempt a *coup d'état* using sophisticated weapons and guerilla tactics? What battle was expected to be fought in Patna and against whom?

The massive might of armed policemen was being deployed against an ageing Gandhian of seventy-one who had threatened to besiege Bihar's discredited Ministers and legislators demanding a dissolution of the State's legislature as it had long lost the confidence of the people of Bihar. He was no Ché Guevara nor even a Charu Muzumdar. Nor were his followers armed rebels. He was a man whose commitment to non-violence and democracy was not questioned by any Indian save those in the Establishment. He was also a man whose role as a freedom-fighter could not be questioned by any objective historian of India's struggle for independence. His followers were students and hundreds of thousands of the common people of Bihar. He had declared a war against corruption in high office, against administrative apathy and arrogance, against manipulative malpractices which robbed the people of his State of food, freedom and justice.

It was an unusual battle fought against a government which

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has usurped more power than any other government elected by the people of India since the inauguration of its Constitution on 26 January 1950. It pitted Jayaprakash Narayan directly against Indira Gandhi and no two public personalities can present a greater contrast.

Mrs. Gandhi, now fifty-seven, was at the peak of her power with every administrative lever in the country at her personal command. Returned to power with a big parliamentary majority in 1971 under the simple, effective slogan of *garibi hatao*, having later humbled Pakistan and helped the rise of Bangladesh, having recently crushed a railwaymen's strike during which she also chose to explode India's first nuclear device, Mrs. Gandhi apparently enjoyed an image of unassailable power which she loved to demonstrate on every occasion.

On the other hand, J. P.—as millions of Indians affectionately call him—was a frail man of seventy-one whose health had met with many major reverses, who had recently lost his wife who had been a personal bridge between him and Mahatma Gandhi, and who had dedicated his life to the Sarvodaya movement which aims at the moral and material emancipation of every man. J. P. had renounced party politics and could not be accused of even remotely nursing any personal ambition. These, then, were the two 'generals' who fought the Battle of Patna on 4 November.

And now the rival armies: Indira Gandhi's commanders at the front included the Bihar Cabinet led by Abdul Ghafoor, leaders of the ruling party in Bihar and the Communist Party of India—her minor partners in a united front who always make major political gains at the expense of a majority of her Congressmen and, perhaps, ultimately at her cost. Mrs. Gandhi, advised by her commanders in New Delhi and Patna, had consented to a plan of crushing J. P.'s intended mahagherao of 4 November.

On J. P.'s side were the students of Bihar, the middle and the lower classes, the small peasants and the landless labourers, chronic victims of man-made famines and shortages, slaves of local big-shots, millions of illiterate and poverty-stricken men, women, and children whose day is yet to dawn even after twenty-seven years of freedom from colonial bondage.

What happened in Patna on 4 November is a sordid story. A city besieged by government forces fearing massive marches from all corners of Bihar, Patna was barricaded and defended against

its own citizens by thousands of policemen and security forces brought in from outside the State which were ordered to thwart the peaceful demonstration of the people's will and resolve to remove a discredited government. All Bihar watched tensely. All India anxiously awaited the news from the battlefield.

People all over India waited for the mass-media to flash reports from Patna. Many were anxious and apprehensive about J. P.'s personal safety. Would he be beaten up? Would he be man-handled? Would he be tear-gassed? Would they arrest him? There were rumours that he might be physically eliminated, although there was a widespread conviction that the Central Government would spare no pains for his personal security since any harm done to him would jeopardise Mrs. Gandhi's own prestige. J. P. suffers from a heart condition, is a diabetic and has a chronic kidney ailment. Even the stresses and strains of this major showdown could affect him adversely.

Telecommunications in India are a government monopoly and they did not answer these questions though the entire country anxiously awaited the news. The next day's newspapers brought the story and for a few days to follow details continued to emerge and show the government in a poor light. According to the staff correspondent of *The Statesman*, reporting from Patna on 3 November, barely ten hours before the proposed showdown, Abdul Ghafoor, the Chief Minister of Bihar, had declared that his government was prepared 'to crush the lawless rebels who are out to destroy democratic institutions and ruin the State'. The same correspondent also reported the arrest of over four thousand persons during the preceding seventy-two hours and the cancellation of all train, bus and steamer services to Patna. He reported further that 'hundreds of capital bound taxis, buses and trucks were stopped by the security people at various checkpoints'. Thousands of copies of a printed leaflet issued by the District Magistrate of Patna were air-dropped in Patna and its adjoining districts. The leaflet was a warning to the potential demonstrators that those who defied the prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code and the Defence of India Rules would be punished with rigorous imprisonment for up to three years. The same day a group of three hundred and sixty-two students was whisked away to an unknown destination by the authorities.

Another report estimated the police force inducted into the

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State to have been thirty thousand strong with over three hundred magistrates deployed for duty. More than three thousand leaders of the movement had already been put behind bars. It was clear that the government was determined to deny the peaceful demonstrators the right to express themselves, having characterised the demonstration itself as a threat to 'democratic institutions'. Chief Minister Ghafoor, who spoke with such determination, was himself securely lodged. In the words of a correspondent, 'his bungalow at 3 King George's Avenue is cordoned off by several rows of barricades, leaving it quite impenetrable even for an infantry assault. There are similar fortifications around the Secretariat and the State Assembly. There are barricades even along the railway tracks. The Sri Krishna Memorial Hall at the far end of the maidan, Patna's premier auditorium, is now used as barracks for the Central Reserve Police.'

Despite these war-like preparations, the government was unable to prevent the people from taking out a procession. Estimates of the size of the procession vary from between fifteen thousand and forty thousand. The demonstrators were as peaceful as they were militant in spirit. However, the counter-action from the police was needlessly and deliberately coercive. In the words of the Bihar correspondent of *Everyman's*, 'they (the demonstrators) broke cordon after cordon, barricade after barricade even as group after group went down under lathi blows or was dispersed and isolated by salvos of teargas shells, and a few hundred managed to break even the last cordon and reach the Serpentine Road residence of the State Finance Minister, Daroga Prasad Rai'.

The demonstrations began at about 10.00 a.m. and continued up to 10.00 p.m. The ace photographer of *The Statesman*, Raghu Rai, was able to take a stunning photograph showing policemen armed with canes attacking J.P. himself. The photograph shows J.P. holding his spectacles in one hand being struck on the shoulder by a cane. Other policemen are seen trying to shield J.P.

This photograph assumes great documentary significance because the Union Home Minister, Brahmananda Reddy, had publicly denied that J.P. was physically attacked. Policemen who did not spare even J.P. acted much more ruthlessly against thousands of peaceful demonstrators. Another candid photograph by Raghu Rai shows a young demonstrator with a head injury, blood dripping over his face and soaking his clothes. From among the demon-

strators not a single hand was raised, nor a single pebble thrown. The police, on the other hand, seriously injured several demonstrators hitting them with batons fitted with brass-knobs for extra effectiveness, breaking their heads, arms, and legs. They are also reported to have kicked the peaceful demonstrators with jackboots. The demonstrators were shelled with tear-gas. At one time, J.P.'s own jeep was completely enveloped by tear-gas.

It was difficult to believe that all this was happening in independent India. The scenes reminded many of the British raj. Instead of the Tommies, native Indian policemen and militia were charging peaceful demonstrations by their own countrymen. Instead of officials of an alien, imperialist regime, an Indian government was directing this brutal show.

It is clear who lost the battle and who won it. Both morally and physically the Government of India and of the State of Bihar were defeated in the battle of Patna. And yet, ironically, Abdul Ghafoor, the Chief Minister of Bihar, said: 'I am happy that nothing serious happened today.'

The seriousness of what happened in Patna on 4 November may have escaped Mr Ghafoor but millions of Indians throughout the country grasped its significance. A government elected by the people, which had been losing the people's confidence rapidly, had chosen to brow-beat, bully and even deal physical blows to people demonstrating peacefully against it. The battle was for the survival of democracy: it was a battle for supremacy between the people and their legislators. It was also a battle raising the question whether India's infant democracy was turning into a dictatorship.

2 The Man

Who is this man and from where has he emerged? The man who has vowed to liberate Bihar from the grip of misgovernment and corruption was born in a middle class *Kayasth* farmer's family in 1902, in the village of Sitabdiara in the Saran district of Bihar. The *Kayasths* are one of the higher non-Brahmin castes whose members are more educated than others and who have contributed many administrators and civil servants throughout northern India. Jayaprakash's father was a minor Government official.

This village boy was seventeen years old before he ever saw a tram car. His rural upbringing was to give Jayaprakash both a lasting love of rural people and a haunting reminder of their poverty and the indignities they suffer.

By the beginning of 1921, J.P. was a student in the Patna Science College. He had already shown intellectual distinction and had won a scholarship but, in response to Mahatma Gandhi's call to boycott British educational institutions, he abandoned his studies just a few days before his examinations and threw himself into the non-cooperation movement, exactly as, half a century later in 1974, he asked the students of Bihar to abandon their studies for a year in order to serve the people. Even after the wave of non-cooperation had subsided, J.P. refused to join Banaras Hindu University because it was supported by government funds.

In the USA

J.P.'s family did not have the financial resources to send him abroad for higher studies but he had heard that in the USA —perhaps the only country in the world where this was possible—a poor boy could go to college and get a degree without having any financial means by the simple expedient of working during vacations and in his spare time.

Encouraged by this thought, Jayaprakash arrived in Cali-

fornia on the west coast of America in October 1922. Though he did not know it then, he was to stay in that country for no less than seven years.

At a public meeting in Patna on 5 June 1974, Jayaprakash recalled those days: 'In America, I worked in mines, in factories and slaughter houses. I worked as a shoeshine boy and even cleaned commodes in hotels. During vacations, I worked. Three or more boys lived in a single room and we cooked our own food. After graduation, I got a scholarship and three months later an assistantship in my department which made it possible for me to live in some comfort.'

While he was thus roughing it out through college, J.P. came under the influence of Marxist propaganda put out by American communists, led at that time by Jay Lovestone, and he became a communist for all practical purposes with one exception. That exception was, however, an important one because it left J.P. a nationalist and a patriot. This was to be important, as we shall see, in his later life.

In 1929, Jayaprakash returned to India. For a little while, he served G.D. Birla as his Private Secretary. Mercifully for the country, that association did not last long and J.P.'s attention turned to politics. 'I was a communist when I returned to India', J.P. was to relate much later, 'but I joined the Congress and not the Communist Party.' Jayaprakash explained why. He mentioned that his patriotic instincts were fortified by the lesson he had learnt from Lenin that 'in colonial countries Communists should in no circumstances isolate themselves from the struggle for independence, even if its leadership is in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the capitalists. But they forgot Lenin. They betrayed the freedom struggle. Mr. Dange helped the CID. We were fighting for our freedom. Gandhi-ji was in jail. Nehru was in jail. And they were acting as traitors.'

Congress Secretary

Soon Jawaharlal Nehru put him in charge of the Labour Relations Department of the AICC and, when the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1932 started and the regular apparatus of the All India Congress Committee was sought to be smashed by the police, Jayaprakash was appointed Acting General Secretary of the AICC functioning underground.

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It was in that capacity that I first met Jayaprakash when he came to see me in the High Court Library in Bombay when I too was functioning 'underground' along with Umashankar Dikshit. Referring to this association with the man who was later, as Home Minister in the Congress Government in Delhi, to cross swords with him in 1974, Jayaprakash was to observe: 'Friendships made underground survive everything.'

The next time I met Jayaprakash was in the 'B' Yard of the Nasik Road Central Prison in January 1933 where he had preceded me, and there we started, with the cooperation of Achyut Patwardhan and some others, the chapter of the conception and birth of the Congress Socialist Party.

Though Jayaprakash was able to see the anti-national role played by the communists in India, in all other respects he unfortunately continued to see eye to eye with them. Hence the sad story of J.P.'s efforts to work out a 'United Front' with the communists which was to end not only in the disruption of the Congress Socialist Party but also in giving the communists a stranglehold over socialist thought in India and a great deal of respectability which they have exploited ever since.

Nothing if not generous, J.P., who had allowed me to part company with him in 1939 rather than part company with the communists, was to admit his mistake when he confessed in 1971 in his booklet *Socialist Unity and the Congress Socialist Party*, that that 'experience has completely vindicated Masani's stand'.

War Time and the Quit India Movement

During the Second World War, J.P.'s exploits fired the imagination of India's youth. Arrested soon after the beginning of the war, he found himself in Hazaribagh prison in his own State of Bihar convicted to nine months' imprisonment. Around the end of 1940, J.P. was released from Hazaribagh jail but in 1941 he found himself detained, this time without trial, in the Deoli Detention camp in Rajasthan. In Deoli he was detained along with several other socialist and communist detenues, there being several of each category.

At one point, the detenues decided to go on an indefinite hunger-strike because of alleged ill-treatment by the authorities. J.P. being an honest man actually fasted. So did many others. But,

as the fast progressed, they discovered to their horror that the communist detainees fasted during the day and ate at night after they were safely locked up! I remember the amusement with which I heard J.P. express his surprise and shock at this.

Early in 1942, J.P. was moved or, as he put it in a letter from prison, 'repatriated' to Hazaribagh jail in his home State. Once the 'Quit India' campaign started in August, J.P. was restless and felt that he could not sit safely in prison during what he considered, like some others, the 'Second War of Indian Independence'.

On 8 November, he and some of his friends made their escape from prison by tying one *dhoti* to the next and thus making a long rope which they threw over the prison wall to their accomplices outside.

For days J.P. and his group wandered aimlessly through the countryside eluding the police who were in hot pursuit. In search of sanctuary, they crossed over the border to Nepal where they thought they could relax. But it seemed that the governments of India and Nepal got together to nab this group who by that time had acquired a few firearms to be used in self-defence. At one point of time, J.P. and members of his group in Nepal were attacked by a police force and there was an exchange of shots. Finding Nepal not as hospitable as he had imagined, J.P. trekked back to Indian soil and managed to remain and function underground for some nine months.

On 17 September 1943, however, J.P. was arrested while travelling incognito to the Punjab. He was then taken into detention and held incommunicado in Lahore Fort. He was not beaten up, but he was not allowed to sleep. The attempt was to get him to confess that both the Mahatma and he were pro-Japanese!

J.P. managed to survive the ordeal. Sensing what was going on, I had an agonising time wondering what was happening to him. I contacted Jeevanlal Kapur, then a lawyer, later a judge and now Chairman of the Delimitation Commission. We decided that the best thing would be to file a *habeas corpus* petition on his behalf. For this purpose my lawyer friend, H. R. Pardivala, went from Bombay to Lahore and he in turn got arrested for a few days but was released on a *habeas corpus* petition. Finally, J.P. was produced in court, which laid down the conditions for his further detention. Taking advantage of my position as Mayor of Bombay, I wrote on 8 February 1944 to Prime Minister Khizr Hayat Khan of the Punjab

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requesting permission to correspond with J.P. and send him reading material. I received a prompt and courteous reply on 29 February giving me permission to write and send books to J.P. subject, of course, to censorship.

When I got elected as a Congress Member of the Indian Legislative Assembly in September 1945, J.P. was still detained in the Agra Central Prison along with Ram Manohar Lohia. My first speech in the Indian Legislative Assembly was a short one demanding J.P.'s and Lohia's release. In a letter from Agra Prison on 8 March 1946, J.P. said that he liked my speech, but he could not resist a critical comment. I had described J.P. as a great patriot and as a gentle person who would not hurt even a fly. J.P. sent me a veritable raspberry by asking: 'Do you think it right to concede that only those who are too gentle to kill flies should be at liberty?'

29 **J.P., Marx and Gandhi**

The story of J.P.'s relationship with Gandhi and of his conversion from Marxism to Sarvodaya is a tangled skein which is not easy to unravel. I had the advantage, however, of watching at close quarters various incidents that were illustrative of J.P.'s changing attitudes from time to time.

Thus, when J.P. and I would call on Gandhiji at Wardha or elsewhere in the thirties, I noticed that while I would shake hands in the normal manner or do a *namasté* standing erect, J. P. would invariably bend down and touch Gandhi's feet. I used to tease him about this and ask how a Marxist like him could behave in this manner. J.P.'s answer, which of course was quite reasonable, was that he had been brought up like a good Hindu to show respect to his elders and he saw no reason why he should not continue to do so. That did not however stop him from being generally very angry with Gandhiji and calling him a 'reactionary'.

This most interesting combination of revolutionary fervour and personal gentleness found many an interesting and sometimes amusing expression. I remember that at the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress in April 1936, after Jawaharlal Nehru had delivered the Presidential Address which was a hundred per cent Marxist in its essentials and world view, Babu Rajendra Prasad, in the course of the debate that followed, stood up and made a somewhat critical reference to Jawaharlal. Speaking in Hindustan

tani, he described himself and his colleagues, with telling sarcasm, as simple peasants who did not travel abroad and derive their ideas from foreign books. Obviously, the shaft was directed at Nehru and us socialists. At the end of this unusually aggressive speech, the larger part of the audience shouted 'Mahatma Gandhi ki jai' to be followed by counter-shouts of 'Jawaharlal Nehru ki Jai' in which I imagine I also participated! As J.P. and I came out of the charged atmosphere of the *pandal*, I noticed that he was very agitated by Rajendra Babu's speech. He had been a great admirer of Rajendra Prasad and was in some distant way related to the older man. As it happened, we soon ran into Mathura Babu, one of Rajendra Prasad's devoted followers, who on his part appeared to be in a jubilant mood and asked J.P. in a somewhat mocking manner: '*Kahiye Jayaprakashji, sunee?*' ('Did you hear that, Jayaprakashji?'). At this J.P. flared up and said in Hindustani: 'Rajendra Babu is not fit even to clean Jawaharlal's shoes.' As we walked on, however, J.P. looked more and more upset and said: 'What have I gone and done now? It is terrible. I never meant it. But Mathura Babu will go and repeat what I said to Rajendra Babu for whom I have such regard.' When we got to a restaurant for lunch, J.P. would not eat and kept on asking what he should do. I suggested that, immediately after lunch, he should go and see Rajendra Babu, tell him what had happened and apologise. When J.P. met Rajendra Babu, the latter took it all very sweetly and asked him to forget about it. That, however, was not the end of the story.

Next morning, when Gandhiji was holding his prayer meeting at four o'clock or thereabouts, Rajendra Babu turned up somewhat unexpectedly for prayers. When Gandhiji asked him what he, with his asthma, was doing there at that time of the morning, Rajendra Babu told Gandhiji that he could not sleep at night and had come to ask for guidance. If Jayaprakash could get so upset with him as to make an offensive remark of that nature, did it not show that he had on his part been guilty of considerable violence against Jawaharlal in his speech? It was this that had made him spend a sleepless night. Gandhiji, who had a great sense of humour, of course made light of the whole affair and told him there was nothing wrong with his speech and sent him back to bed. Where else in the world, one wonders, would two politicians allow their meals and sleep to be disturbed in this manner by pangs of conscience? Churchill and Nye Bevan? Unlikely!

Underneath this soft heart, however, was an iron determination which at that time held J.P. like a vice to Marxism. Why J.P., whose patriotism was so intense and who was so broad-minded in every respect, should cling so hard to the pro-communist line was a question that bothered some of us who loved him and yet found his obstinacy on the subject irritating. A part of the answer came to light at a Summer School that the Congress Socialist Party had organised at Sonepur, a small village which had the distinction of having the longest railway platform in India which was meant to accommodate thousands of peasants and cattle who came every year to attend a big peasant fair. It was from 24 March to 2 April 1938 that we had planned this Summer School in order to educate our party workers, and J.P. and I were there to join in conducting classes and leading discussions.

The only thing that stands out in my mind about that Summer School is a little contretemps I had with J.P. I had just finished reading *Assignment in Utopia* by Eugene Lyons, an American communist of Russian origin who, after spending many years in the Soviet Union, had returned to the U.S.A. to tell the story of his disillusionment. I was so moved by this honest and passionate denunciation of Soviet tyranny and Stalin's betrayal that I gave the book to J.P. to read one evening.

The next morning at breakfast, J.P. handed the book to me. Since he could hardly have read the whole book overnight, I looked at him inquiringly. 'I read a few chapters', he said, 'I do not want to read any more.' I asked whether this was because he thought it was an anti-Soviet book. 'No', he said, 'it seems to me to be honest.' He went on to explain why, nonetheless, he would not read it. He said that he had once been a Hindu and had given up his religion in order to embrace Marxism. I was now trying to destroy his new faith. 'May be all that Eugene Lyons writes about the USSR is true, but why should it happen here?' he argued, and added: 'We can avoid all these horrors. In any event, I cannot afford to give up my orthodoxy. Otherwise I do not know where I would end up.' And that was that.

I told J.P. that I was horrified at his refusal to face facts which seemed to me to be like that of the ostrich which was supposed to dig its head into the sand so as not to see approaching danger. We who were responsible for influencing the minds of the young in the country could hardly afford that luxury. I failed to

shake J.P. on this point. For several years he would not look at anything that told the grim truth about the failure of the October revolution.

At that stage of his life J.P. was, I fear, a very deeply confused man. A great deal had happened to shake his faith in communism both in Russia and in India. There is no doubt that Gandhiji's generous and friendly attitude towards him was also slowly making its impact. Still, he could not make up his mind to give up communism.

Gandhiji too seemed to be aware of the internal struggle that was going on. Some time in May 1939, J.P. and I were both in Delhi. Gandhiji was in town and I went to call on him to discuss the likely onset of World War II and the stand we should take in case it broke out. When the conversation turned to J.P., Gandhiji told me that while he accepted my own adherence to non-violence, he was not convinced about J.P.'s. He went on to lament the fact that a future leader of India like J.P. should be so uncertain about fundamentals like the attitude towards violence and non-violence. In an attempt at defending J.P., I told Gandhiji that J.P. believed in non-violence but that he was an angry young man with a short temper. 'No, no', protested Gandhiji, 'he does not have a short temper. He harbours anger in his heart.'

When I got back to the place where J.P. and I stayed in Delhi, he happened to be shaving. I reported my conversation with the old man. When I reported Gandhiji's comment about him, J.P. stopped shaving for quite a while and, when I asked him why, he replied that he was so terribly upset about Gandhiji's judgement that he would cut himself if he continued shaving. Once again, that combination of the Yogi and the Commissar!

Though J.P. was at last cured, thanks to the Indian communists' betrayal of the Quit India Movement and their treacherous 'Peoples War' line and alliance with the British Government, he was still not ready to give up Marxism. The correspondence he carried on from prison, first from Lahore and then from Agra, shows the beginnings of a change. J.P.'s letters to me were clipped by the censors so thoroughly that what remained were mainly comments on the various books I sent him. These, however, were very revealing. Being rather naughty, I had deliberately sent him books such as Hyaek's *Road to Serfdom*, James Burnham's *The Machiavellians* and Arthur Koestler's *The Yogi and the Commissar*, so that he could stop

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behaving like an ostrich. This time J.P. read these books for two reasons: first, he had already been disillusioned by the communists, and, second, the poor chap had no option! J.P.'s response to these books was now positive and appreciative. His comment on Koestler's book in his letter to me of 19 August 1945 from Agra prison was: 'I think I am mainly a Commissar type with Yogic leanings.' I wonder how he would modify that mixture now. Would he describe himself as a Yogi type with Commissar leanings?

I also sent J.P. an early copy of my book *Socialism Reconsidered* which was packed with heresy from J.P.'s point of view. About this he wrote: 'I do not know if you will be happy or begin to doubt your sanity but I nearly agreed with you hundred per cent! Well, the world does change, doesn't it?'

The world was changing, but not yet completely. It seems J.P. was reproached by his orthodox socialist colleagues for having thus blessed my heresy and he clarified his remark by saying that what he meant was that he agreed a hundred per cent with my denunciation of Stalin's regime in Russia but not my acceptance of Gandhi. About that part of my book he claimed to have reservations:

People keep on inquiring if I have written anything. Well you tell them that I have—letters to Minoo Masani and others. Aren't they enough? By the way one of my letters to you has created a rather embarrassing situation. When I wrote from Lahore that I agreed nearly hundred per cent with your *Socialism Reconsidered* I was thinking largely of your treatment of Russia. I do not mean to suggest that I disagreed with the other parts, but my agreement with them was not nearly as complete. Will you please put me right in this matter with those whom it may concern?

Yes I do remember the walks we had together in Nasik. Here too I have my evening walk, but alone as Rammanohar is unable to take any exercise....

Talking of Nasik, Minoo, let me say that the Nasik days were the happiest days I have yet spent in prison, and I cherish dearly the friendships I made there.

After coming out of prison, J.P. argued with me that it was better to be orthodox and to reinterpret Marx rather than renounce him as I had done. The former method had the advantage that it was possible to maintain contact with the true believers and gradu-

ally influence them in the right direction, while my method only made them angry and regard me as a renegade. I remember that, some time in 1945, we both addressed a public meeting at the K.R. Cama Hall in Bombay when he was the speaker and I was in the Chair. He told me then in conversation that even though his faith in Marxism was shaken he felt that it was better not to renounce it and become a heretic like me but to try and convert his fellow Marxists. In these matters, as Louis Fischer put it, everyone has to have his own 'Kronstadt'. J.P.'s was to come eight years later.

J.P. used to keep in touch with Bapu and see him from time to time. One such meeting was on the eve of the All India Congress Committee in Delhi on 14 June 1947. This he did in a last unsuccessful effort to reactivate Gandhiji in resisting the attempt at partition.

A little later, on the eve of the transfer of power, Gandhi—who as is well known was not happy about the line taken by Nehru and Patel—sought to create a new balance in the Congress by thinking of J.P. as the new President of the Congress so that he might be a countervailing force and a check on Nehru and Patel who were to head the new government. Nehru did not respond when Gandhiji put the idea to him. He in turn suggested Acharya Narendra Deva who was very close to him. Narendra Deva was in turn vetoed by Sardar Patel. Finally, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was nominated President.

It is a real tragedy that J.P.'s conversion to Gandhism was so slow that by the time he renounced Marxism and committed himself to Sarvodaya, Gandhiji had passed away. Otherwise, who knows he might have achieved that kind of rapport with Gandhiji which might have changed India's destiny.

The Fast

The definite break with Marxism was not to come till 1952. At that time, J.P. was the President of the Post and Telegraph Employees' Federation and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai was the Minister in charge of the Communications portfolio. A strike called by the Federation was called off as a result of negotiations between J.P. and Kidwai. A certain understanding was reached between them about payment of wages during the period of strike, but this was not reduced to paper, and a little later Kidwai backed out. J.P. felt

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that he had let down his own men and that he had to do penance for his carelessness in not getting the agreement in writing. He decided on a twenty-one day fast at the Dinshah Mehta Clinic in Poona. Any other politician would have called this a hunger strike or a protest fast against the Minister, but not so J.P. A statement he issued on 22 June 1952, a day prior to embarking on his fast, ran as follows:

To my Friends and Doctors:

- (1) This fast is not against anybody, nor for anything outside of myself.
- (2) It may be recalled that the decision to fast had originated over a year ago from certain unsuccessful negotiations I had carried on with Shri Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, the then Communications Minister, regarding payment of strike period wages to postmen and lower grade staff.
- (3) But today the fast has nothing to do (except for this historical connection) with those negotiations, nor with the Central Government, nor with Shri Kidwai.
- (4) The fast is (a) in the nature of a self-correction, and (b) in fulfillment of a vow.
- (5) During my negotiations with Shri Kidwai, I found I was guilty of carelessness and negligence. This was not in connection with a personal affair, but in the course of public work; and it affected a large number of men.
- (6) The vow to fast was taken at that time to atone for the mistake. Today that particular mistake serves only an illustrative purpose, and I venture to hope that the fast will fit me better to discharge my duties in the future.
- (7) The fact that I have not been able to carry out my vow till now has pained me. I cannot delay it any longer, and I hope I shall have the blessings even of those friends who have not approved of the fast.
- (8) The fast will commence on the morning of June 23 and will last for three weeks, subject only to the limitation that I have no wish to die in its course.
- (9) During the fast I shall take only water with Soda-bicarb and common salt.
- (10) The fast being an entirely personal affair, I do not want any publicity, agitation or any sympathetic public manifestation in connection with it.

(11) The postmen, particularly, should not feel that they have any responsibility in the matter and should not indulge in any agitation on my account.

Some of us were a little worried whether J.P. would be able to see the fast through. He did not have Gandhiji's background of discipline and dieting to sustain him. I used to keep in close touch from Bombay with his wife Prabhavati in Poona. Some time midway through the fast, I went to Poona to see J.P. Before going to see him, I asked Prabhavati what effect the fast was having on him as such fasts are supposed to promote the spiritual development of the person fasting and I was curious. Prabhavati told me that the fast was having a good effect on J.P. and his thinking but had not made quite the impact that Gandhiji's fasts had on him.

While I was chatting with J.P. at his bedside, I asked if he would write an article for *Freedom First*, the monthly journal of the Democratic Research Service with which I was associated. I told him that it was high time that he publicly renounced Marxism. To my delight, J.P. said he would let me have the article and asked how many days I would give him. Ten days was my reply to make sure that he sent it while he was still in bed! I may in my own self-defense add that J.P. is a most reluctant article writer and correspondent! The article reached me within a week in Bombay. It appeared in the September 1952 issue of *Freedom First*, under the title: 'Incentives to Goodness'. In a notable paragraph, J.P. at last jettisoned his Marxist intellectual baggage:

For many years, I have worshipped at the shrine of the goddess dialectical materialism—which seemed to me intellectually more satisfying than any other philosophy. But while the main quest of philosophy remains unsatisfied, it has become patent to me that materialism of any sort robs man of the means to become truly human. In a material civilisation man has no rational incentive to be good. It may be that in the kingdom of dialectical materialism, fear makes men conform, and the Party takes the place of God. But when that God himself turns vicious, to be vicious becomes an universal code.

I feel convinced, therefore, that man must go beyond the material to find the incentives to goodness. As a corollary, I feel further that the task of social reconstruction cannot succeed under the

inspiration of a materialist philosophy.

Thus at last was the dead hand of Karl Marx discarded. I often wonder if J.P.'s acceptance of Sarvodaya is some kind of penance he is doing for having delayed his acceptance of Gandhiji's fundamentals. Could remorse be one of the reasons? When 'I was to ask J.P. later whether I was right in holding the view that it was during this fast that he finally jettisoned Marxism, J.P. replied: 'I had three weeks to think it over, and, as you correctly say, I came to reject the philosophy based on Marxism and dialectical materialism because it did not offer the answer to the question: "Why should man be good, or why should anyone be good?"'

It is clear that the spiritual element in J.P. had won out in the end. Sarvodaya is in a way J.P.'s third religion. In March 1938 in Sonepur he could not see to what he could turn if he discarded Marxism. In Poona in 1952 he found the answer. It was in a way also a step back to Hinduism, though perhaps only a partial one, but from then on there was no looking back.

Bhoodan

Very soon J.P. devoted himself entirely to Sarvodaya activities. The Sarvodaya movement is Gandhi's legacy and J.P., who has always been inalienably involved with the masses of rural India, was drawn into it. Gandhians who had remained outside politics but were carrying out Gandhi's programme for the social and economic emancipation of the Indian masses had found in Acharya Vinoba Bhave the kind of leader they needed after Gandhi's assassination in 1948. Vinoba had launched his 'Bhoodan' movement in April 1951 and the Gandhian in J.P.—in search of a fair and equitable social order founded on every man's voluntary commitment to truth and non-violence—found a cause to identify himself with.

J.P.'s wife, Prabhavati, had been a dedicated Gandhian social worker for most of her life and both Gandhi and Vinoba had great affection for her. Both J.P. and Prabhavati had been leading an ascetic life and J.P. became the first *jeevandani*—dedicating his life to Sarvodaya. It is interesting to note that while Nehru became Gandhi's political heir after 1947, J.P. was to emerge as Gandhi's moral and social successor. As late as in the 1970's Ostergaard and Curell inform us in their study of the Sarvodaya movement—*The Gentle Anarchists*—that J.P. was the choice of as many as 86 per cent

of the Sarvodayis interviewed by them, to be Vinoba's successor.

Unlike Gandhi and Vinoba, J.P. speaks in a modern western idiom and translates the ideals of Sarvodaya into concepts familiar to most of the elite. As early as 1952, J.P. wrote an essay—From Socialism to Sarvodaya—in which he observed:

I decided to withdraw from party and power politics not because of disgust or sense of any personal frustration, but because it became clear to me that politics could not deliver the goods, the goods being the same old goals of equality, freedom, brotherhood, peace.... The politics of Sarvodaya can have no party and no concern with power. Rather its aim will be to see that all centres of power are abolished. The more this new politics grows, the more the old politics shrinks. A real withering away of the State!

J.P. has remained essentially faithful to this view more than twenty years later. His revolt today is against statism and the growing centralisation of power. He still believes in the ultimate replacement of Raj-niti, or state power politics, by Lok-niti, or people's politics.

There is a vast gap between Vinoba's traditional Hindu idiom and J.P.'s sophisticated westernised idiom with a strong resemblance to classical anarchism and yet invested with good practical sense. To J.P., corruption is the consequence of the centralisation of power which also threatens man's fundamental freedoms.

There is as much contrast between Gandhi and Vinoba as there is between Vinoba and J.P. As a third generation Gandhian, J.P. brings back to the Gandhian movement the all-pervasive social and moral sensitiveness that was Gandhi's own hall-mark. While Vinoba was Gandhi's spiritual successor, by temperament he is more in the Hindu tradition of saints and gurus than Gandhi himself was. This might explain why J.P.'s Bihar movement was later to precipitate a confrontation between Vinoba and himself and a crisis of identity for the Sarvodaya movement itself.

In the Bihar Countryside

It was in 1954 that J.P. joined the 'Bhoodan' movement conducted by Acharya Vinoba Bhave and the All-India Seva Sangh. He built his own ashram at Sekhodeora in Gaya district in Bihar.

Then started for many years his wanderings through the countryside of India moving from village to village asking for bhoodan, the gift of land, as a part of the campaign in pursuit of Gandhiji's Theory of 'Trusteeship'.

Early in 1954, J.P. asked me to spend a few days with him in Bihar, the idea being that I should walk with him on his tour in the course of which he was collecting land for the landless, and I was thus privileged to have a glimpse of the kind of life J.P. was to lead for many a year.

On 6 March 1954, I found myself in a jeep speeding northward from the city of Gaya. I caught up with J.P. in the little village of Kalpa, some five or six miles from the town of Jehanabad. The jeep came to a stop outside the village library and on the verandah sat J.P. holding counsel with the villagers. Soon he moved to an open space where there was a little platform with a radio set through which he could address the crowd that had collected. J.P. responded to the welcome that had been extended to him. He stressed that what he was after was not *manpatras* (addresses) but *danpatras* (deeds of gift).

Jayaprakash, sitting on a chair on the platform, started chatting with his modest audience. After a few minutes, he noticed that two old men were squatting under a tree, a little removed from the main body of the meeting. Since the loudspeaker had refused to function—an occurrence not unusual in this campaign—and it was doubtful whether the old gentlemen could follow the proceedings, Jayaprakash strolled over to them and invited them to come and join the congregation. He assured them that they would not be making any commitments to donate land if they did so and would be perfectly free to leave the meeting at the end with their property intact. Encouraged by this, the cagey old men moved closer and joined the crowd.

A few minutes after Jayaprakash had resumed his address, a child in the audience started crying because his little neighbour had done something to tease him and the speech had to be interrupted again for a minute to enable silence to be restored.

A little later in the proceedings, an unpunctual member of the audience rode up to the meeting across the fields on his little pony. The front ranks of the audience melted away and gathered round the pony in great excitement. One or two boys tried to clamber on to the back of the pony. Showing no signs of irritation, Jayaprakash

asked in some amusement what all the excitement was about. 'It is a pony', answered some children. 'Yes, I see, but so what?' asked Jayaprakash. 'But we have not seen a pony for a long time', retorted a child and so the meeting adjourned once again until the rival show concluded and the pony was led away to a safe distance, the cynosure of juvenile eyes.

I was to listen to several speeches made by Jayaprakash at other villages on our route. Each speech differed a little from the one that had gone before. There were local questions and local problems to deal with, but the gist of the message remained more or less the same. Here, as I recall, is the essence of Jayaprakash's appeal to the villagers of Jehanabad subdivision.

'We live', Jayaprakash started by saying, 'in an age of moral corruption. Why is this so? This is so because God made man to be happy but man has departed from the path of *dharma*, which is to be happy in another's joy and sad in another's sorrow.' Jayaprakash then compared the behaviour of human beings with that of dogs scrapping for a bone, each for himself. He would refer to the recent *kumbh mela* at Allahabad to which some people from Gaya district had gone: 'Some people go to the Ganges to wash off their sins and get purified. But the Ganges is right here and *shuddi* (purification) can be had at home also. If you wish to be purified, you do not have to go all the way to Allahabad.'

Having thus started by making a moral appeal to his listeners, Jayaprakash came down to earth and stressed the fact that this was an era of change: 'You see profound changes taking place around you in the world. The British Raj which you had for many years has gone, so have the Maharajas. The zamindar who was with you till the other day has also gone now.'

Then he asked: 'Do you think the world will now remain as it is for eternity? Is there any reason why it should now stop changing? I can assure you it is not so. That is not the nature of the universe in which there is constant change. For one thing, the landless will not let it rest as it is. Some people have too much land, while others have none. Land must and will be more justly redistributed. Further changes must come, one way or the other.'

Then Jayaprakash turned to other countries of the world, particularly to Russia and China, and pointed out how certain changes which had become overdue had come about there. 'In Russia', he said, 'they came with violence, ~~brutality~~ and murder. They have

done no one any good.' He pointed out that in Telengana a similar effort resulted in at least three thousand people being killed and millions of rupees worth of property being destroyed. 'The bigger revolution is to bring about change peacefully and through love,' he urged. 'Let those with a lot of land give away the surplus, let the middle peasants give away a sixth of their land, and let even the poor give just a tiny bit as a token of their participation.'

Answering those who asked why they should not wait for a law to be passed for the redistribution of land, Jayaprakash said: 'Certainly let laws be passed to redistribute the land fairly. But what merit is there for the man who waits to be dispossessed by virtue of law? What merit is there for the zamindar who had been expropriated by law? Does anyone remember his name or sing his praises? Do you need a law to be passed before you desist from theft? Of course not. Self-redemption cannot come from above or without. There is little difference between the sword and the law. Both are coercive.'

Jayaprakash then traced the history of the 'Bhoodan Yagna' and described how it started. It was when the region of Telengana in the state of Hyderabad had been ravaged by the violence of the communists and the counter-violence of the military and police who had been sent to suppress them and to restore order that the idea of 'Bhoodan Yagna' was born. At the village of Pochampalli some Harijans asked Vinobaji, who was preaching non-violence and trying to heal the wounds of the people: 'So long as some of us are hungry, how can there be peace in the village?' Vinobaji asked the man: 'How much land do you need?' 'Eighty acres would suffice for our group of Harijan families', the man replied. Vinobaji turned to the landlords present for an answer. Suddenly, one of them, Rama-chandra Reddy, got up and offered a sixth of his land—a hundred acres. That was twenty acres more than was needed. Joyful at heart, Vinobaji turned to the Harijans and said : 'Here is your answer' and he thought to himself: 'If this can happen in Pochampalli, why not in the rest of Telengana?' Within a few weeks, Vinobaji had collected a great deal of land in the region of Telengana.

During the next few days we moved on from village to village. At one village meeting, just as Jayaprakash was going to start speaking, a leaflet was placed in his hands which had been issued under the name of the Jahanabad Kisan Sabha and the Jahanabad Democratic Youth League. The title of the leaflet was: 'Beware of the Net of Illusion of Bhoodan Yagna'. The rest of the leaflet went on to

malign Vinoba and Jayaprakash as enemies of the peasants who were seeking to divert their attention from the class struggle.

A set of questions addressed to Jayaprakash by an anonymous questioner also reached the platform. It was obvious that a few communists had got to the village ahead of Jayaprakash in order to frustrate his work. One of the questions was: 'What do you think of what has been achieved in Russia and China?'

J.P. started by saying that he had no use whatsoever for the kind of society that had come into existence in Russia and China. He disliked it a hundred per cent. What had the people in Russia got? Certainly not what Lenin had wanted. Not the peasants and workers but those who controlled the Red Army and the Secret Police were enjoying the fruits of the revolution. Stalin's had been a reign of terror. Such people still ruled Russia after his death. In a dictatorship there can be no rule of the people, as there is in India under its present democratic Constitution.

He then patiently explained to the peasants, perhaps for the first time in their lives, what had been happening in Russia and how on Stalin's death Malenkov, Beria and Molotov had jointly seized power. He then spoke about their quarrels and about Beria's liquidation, and asked: 'Who decided for Malenkov or against Beria? It was not the people but the Red Army tanks which were stronger than the Secret Police. The man with the biggest gun won. Soviet Raj was like the Raj of Ravan, the villain of the Ramayana. That is why they did not wish to imitate it. Even wealth was not distributed. One man got a hundred times as much as another. Inequalities had increased. A new caste system had sprung up, and new exploiters ruled in place of the old.'

And then he said:

You may say it cannot happen here in India, but that is not true. Do not think the Himalayas will protect us. The fire is at our door. It has already destroyed life and property in Telengana. Communist violence was suppressed there by counter-violence. It was, however, killed only when Vinobaji arrived there. If Communism comes to India, it will come over Vinobaji's corpse and my own. But we shall not be able to stop it unless you all cooperate with us now.

When Jayaprakash invited donations of land, the response

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was not as good as in Jamuk. J.P. was sad at this lack of generosity since the donations of land were less than even one-tenth or one-twelfth. Before leaving the village, J.P. told them that since these gifts were not made from the heart, he was returning their *danpatras*.

As we trekked to the next village, I asked J.P. whether those whom he had thus reproached would not be only too happy to get back their *danpatras* and call it a day. J.P. thought that their reaction to his words would be different.

While we were resting at the next village, who should come into the room somewhat breathless and panting heavily but a couple of men whom we had left behind in Surangapur a few hours back. They reported that after J.P. had left their village, they had felt very unhappy and had gathered to take counsel. The message was they were sorry for what happened earlier and that new *danpatras* would satisfy Jayaprakash that the message of 'Bhoodan' had really reached them. J.P. turned to me with a laugh and said: 'You see.' He thanked the men and said 'Shabash' (well done) and asked them to go home happy to their village. And I thought to myself: 'What little faith we of the cities have in our fellow men!'

The Conscience-Keeper

In the years to follow, whenever a major issue arose which involved the honour of India, J.P. became India's conscience-keeper. Thus, in 1956, it was he who raised his powerful voice in defence of the freedom of the people of Hungary against the Soviet tanks at a time when Prime Minister Nehru was unable for days on end to see who was attacking whom!

Again, in 1960, he came forward as the champion of the peace-loving people of Tibet and their leader, the Dalai Lama, whose country had been overrun by the Chinese Communist forces while the Government of India stood by and watched in supine silence prating about Chinese 'sovereignty' over that hapless land.

In the mid-sixties, J.P., as always the country's conscience-keeper, felt the need to intervene in Nagaland where the Indian security force had for years been engaged in an inconclusive shooting encounter with the Naga Army and 'the Federal Republic of Nagaland'. J.P. decided that his love of freedom and his regard for the good name of India demanded that he should study the situation and try to bring about a cease-fire which might lead, in course of

time, to a settlement between the Indian Government and the Nagaland Government. He very wisely refused to take sides between secession on the one hand and a large measure of autonomy within the Indian Union on the other. The Baptist Church, which was a major denomination and had done a wonderful job in spreading education and medical relief, set up a Peace Group to cooperate with J.P.

In September 1954, a ceasefire was signed between the Indian authorities on the one side and the Nagaland Federal Government on the other. For this act of statesmanship, a great deal of credit must go not only to J.P. but also to the then Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, who in his own way acted as a gentle brake on Indian chauvinism.

Diabetes

In the mid-fifties, J.P. was found to have contracted diabetes. While he could be persuaded to take insulin during a crisis, he objected that daily injections of foreign matter in the system were unnatural and therefore un-Gandhian. My argument that insulin was simply a replacement for the juices normally secreted by the pancreas and not a drug went unheeded. I wrote to Acharya Vinoba Bhave, pleading for his support in persuading J.P. to take insulin and not risk his life. Far from getting any encouragement, all I got from Vinoba Bhave was a snub saying that he entirely agreed with J.P.! I was naturally disappointed. Perhaps faith in God made these good men support a proposition which I thought was suicidal.

Suddenly, some time in May 1956, someone told me that a German doctor in Bombay by the name of Dr. Amson was experimenting with something that could be taken by mouth in place of the daily injection of insulin to which J.P. objected. I went and saw Dr. Amson. Dr. Amson, who evidently held J.P. in high esteem, said he would be delighted to cooperate, but must examine J.P. to make sure that his particular kind of diabetes would be amenable to 'Nadisan', which was the name of the tablet manufactured in Germany which Dr. Amson was trying out in India.

I wrote to J.P. on 15 May 1956 telling him about my talk with Dr. Amson and forwarding an article by an American published in the journal of the Indian medical profession in March 1956. J.P.

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wrote back to me on 18 May saying: 'You have sent me the best news of the century.' He also agreed to come down to be examined. So, after all, I corrected myself, the man really wants to live!

Fortunately, Dr. Amson found that 'Nadisan' would work on J.P. and, since the tablets were not yet available in India, he very generously kept J.P. in supplies for several years as a little *dan* (gift) from himself.

Naxalites

J.P. saw in Naxalbari, in Bengal—from which the Naxalites got their name—as Acharya Vinoba Bhave saw in Telengana in 1948, symptoms of a disease, a challenge and a focal point for action. J.P.'s basic attitude to the Naxalites was that, while he disagreed with the terrorism and violence preached and practised by the Indian Maoists, he was at the same time conscious of the fact that India could not have social peace without solving the problem of land and doing justice to the share-croppers. He decided to press for his alternative to Naxalism.

In the middle of 1970, J.P. settled down in the Musahari block of Muzaffarpur district in Bihar and started a campaign to persuade the Naxalites and the people there to accept the peaceful way to revolution. Musahari is one of the forty Community Development Blocks in Muzaffarpur. It has a total area of 43,983 acres, of which 36,398 acres are cultivated. Its estimated present population (rural) is 1,18,737. The land: man ratio (taking into account only the cultivated land) works out to thirty cents per capita. Taking the total acreage, the ratio comes to thirty-seven cents per capita. There are seventeen village panchayats in the Block and 121 revenue villages.

This decision of J.P.'s to go there was prompted by a report that he heard in Dehra Dun, where he was in the beginning of June, that the Naxalites had held out a threat to assassinate two prominent Sarvodaya leaders—Badri Babu, President of the Sarvodaya Mandal, and Gopal Misra, Secretary of the Gram Swaraj Samiti. J.P. told the press on 4 June that, since the *sarvodayis* bear no arms and work in the open, any secret and violent group could kill them and it would be the easiest thing to do requiring no bravery or skill. Outlining the Sarvodaya ideal, he said: 'We specially stress the importance of people's power at the community and work

place levels, that is, in the factory, offices or institutions.' He continued:

Sarvodaya endeavours to realise its ideals through people's direct action. In this respect it is more akin to a violent revolution. A violent revolution is never accomplished by legislation. It is also brought about by people's direct action. The difference is that in the case of a violent revolution, the old social order is destroyed only when, after a long period of struggle and preparation, the revolution is victorious; and the construction of the new social order begins only thereafter, and proceeds slowly from stage to stage. In the case of a non-violent revolution, on the other hand, both the processes of transformation of the old social order and reconstruction of the new go together side by side.

In two articles which he was to write later in *The Hindustan Times* on 29 November and 6 December, J.P. referred to the way in which the press had dramatised his work in Musahari by saying that he had accepted the 'challenge' of the Naxalites and decided to 'fight them'. 'I, no doubt, have my human share of vanity', wrote J.P., 'but I am not a particularly vain person. Even during my political days, when I was younger, it was not my wont to throw challenges about or "declare war" on political opponents. I have no army, not even a non-violent army, to fight the Naxalites with, nor do I look upon what I am doing as a fight *against* anybody but as a fight for social and economic justice. The truth, quite contrary to what has been made out, is that I have undertaken my present task prayerfully and in a spirit of deep humility.'

In May 1970 an attack was made on the Gandhi Peace Foundation Centre in Jamshedpur by the Naxalites. A bomb was burst and Gandhiji's picture was stoned and broken. When the news of this reached Jayaprakash he wrote:

If the partisans of violence look upon Gandhiji as an enemy, should that surprise us? We should rather feel happy that the advocates of bloody revolution should find such power in Gandhiji's ideas and fear them so much that they should want to erase his very memory. But these are very foolish people. Truth can never be destroyed. Indeed, the more it is attempted to destroy it, the brighter and purer it shines forth.

There is yet another cause for our rejoicing. We Gandhians were slowly becoming dull and spiritless and bogged down in our petty quarrels. The reason was that we had no opposition to face, no risk to take. But now, when we will have to do our work at the risk of our lives, we shall be purified, water and milk shall be separated and our mettle will shine brightly, (Translated from Hindi)

‘If the press insists’, continued J.P., ‘on describing this as “fighting” the Naxalites, it may. But that is not how I myself look upon my work. Mine is not a negative but a positive task.

‘That these are not afterthoughts indicating a retreat from a previous fighting position should be clear from the note I had circulated at a meeting of political leaders of the District which had been convened on the eve of my departure from Muzzafarpur town for my first village camp on 8 June. That note had also been released to the press. It will be seen from that brief note that in my view Naxalism was “primarily a social, economic, political and administrative problem and only secondarily a law and order question”, and that I was seeking the parties’ cooperation in tackling the problem in its primary aspects alone. My modus operandi had also been indicated in that same note.

‘As for the law and order aspect of Naxalism, it is my view that it should be solely the concern of the government, which alone has the authority, duty and resources to protect the lives and property of the citizen. I believe that any encouragement to organise private armed resistance to Naxalism, especially in the context of a weak government, is fraught with the danger of eventual escalation into civil war. But, while the government must do its duty, let no one forget that no amount of arrests, imprisonment and shootings can put down Naxalism or any other kind of revolutionary violence, unless at the same time the remedy is applied at the roots. In this latter effort, of course, the government, political parties, social and Gandhian workers can all make their significant contribution.’

J.P.’s programme, as he outlined it, was in two parts. One part related to the implementation of the Gramdan pledges obtained in the Block and involved the redistribution of one-twentieth of the land covered by Gramdan. The other part was to distribute undistributed Bhoodan lands, to ensure that every ‘privileged person’

had received his homestead *parchas*, to look into the problems of landless labourers, and to take up specific cases of injustice and oppression.

His work in Musahari provided J.P. with an opportunity to ruminate about the Indian countryside and his attitude to it. He wrote:

Even though this is not the first time that I have taken up intensive village work, I had not buried myself in this manner before in a limited rural area for such highly intensive work for an indefinite period. This has naturally given me a unique opportunity to look closely at the reality of village life in these parts. Being a villager myself, I love village life and would any day prefer to live in my own village than, say, Patna or Delhi. But in spite of this partiality I must confess that the socio-economic reality in the village, on close examination, is ugly and distressing in the extreme. My first reaction on coming face to face with reality was to realise how remote and unreal were the brave pronouncements of Delhi or Patna from the actuality at the ground level! High sounding words, grandiose plans, reforms galore. But somehow they all, or most of them, manage to remain suspended somewhere up in mid-air. They hardly touch the ground—at least not here. Or touch it very lightly. In the event, what meets the eye is utter poverty, misery, inequality, exploitation, backwardness, stagnation, frustration and loss of hope.

Describing the conditions there, he said:

I find in Musahari that, on an average, only about 50 per cent of the so-called 'privileged persons'—it would be hard to imagine a more unprivileged group of persons than these landless people—have so far received their *parchas* (prescribed official forms stating the area of the homestead and granting permanent tenancy in it to the privileged persons concerned). This is not all. In many cases in which *parchas* have already been issued, the area recorded has been pitifully small—I have seen many *parchas* in which the area entered was just one cent of land! Mercifully the local administration is quite cooperative in issuing *parchas* to those left out, as well as ordering remeasurement and correcting the *parchas* where necessary.

Dealing with the violence prevalent, he observed:

A part of this violence is no doubt artificially created in pursuance of a political ideology, but it would never have taken any root had not the ground been prepared for it by the persistence of poverty, unemployment and a myriad social-economic injustices. If my remark about the implementation of existing reform laws producing a mini-social revolution in the countryside is true, its converse is equally true. The failure to implement those laws for such a protracted period of time has inevitably led to the growth of the rural violence that we witness today. It is not the so-called Naxalites who have fathered this violence but those who have persistently defied and defeated the law for the past so many years—be they politicians, administrators, landowners or money-lenders.

The central issue in all revolutions is that of power, and though they are all made in the name of people's power, power comes invariably to be usurped by a handful of the most ruthless among the erstwhile revolutionaries. Nor can it be otherwise when power comes out of the barrel of the gun and the gun is not in the hands of the common people but in those of the organised instruments of violence that a successful revolution always throws up—the 'revolutionary' army and its auxiliaries.

If democracy is found wanting and violence offers no solution, what then is the way out? To find the way we will have to go back to Gandhiji. His plan was to create, along with the power of the state, the power of the people.

Bangladesh

In May 1971, J.P. was deeply distressed at the wanton killing of people in Bangladesh, then a part of Pakistan, and the flood of refugees that was flowing into India. He decided to undertake a world tour to awaken the international conscience against the massacres in Bangladesh. J.P. and his friends knew that being a non-official, he would not be able to get any commitments from any of the government leaders whom he hoped to meet. No tangible results were expected, but it was hoped that he would be able to focus the attention of the world on the atrocities that were being committed by the military dictatorship of Pakistan against a large

segment of the human race. This was achieved in the countries and many world capitals which J.P. visited

In Rome, Pope Paul expressed his deep concern and sympathy at what was happening in Bangladesh. The Pope said that with regard to help being given to the people of Bangladesh, the Pakistan Army was 'interfering' with relief work, and it was not possible to do any work until this interference was stopped. J.P. wrote:

At that point, I requested that the Holy Father should issue an appeal to arouse the conscience of the world in respect of the suffering and misery of the people of Bangladesh. He nodded his head but said nothing. Then he took both my hands in his and blessed me—that ended the interview.

A few days later, Pope Paul did issue a universal appeal to come to the aid of the refugees from Bangladesh as well as the people of Bangladesh.

Dacoits

In 1971, there was an interesting diversion from his main work when J.P. got involved in the liberation and emancipation of the dacoits of Chambalghat district in Madhya Pradesh. The dacoits of the Chambal valley had an India-wide reputation. It all started with the leader of the Chambalghati dacoits, Madhao Singh, visiting J.P. incognito and asking for his blessings and guidance. J.P. was naturally reluctant. 'It was after a great deal of persuasion on his part', he wrote later in *Everyman's* in 1973, 'that I reluctantly agreed to involve myself in this business of surrender.' Thus started long and intricate negotiations which involved Jayaprakash meeting not only the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Mr. P.C. Sethi, but also the Prime Minister. The end product, however, was a great success. By 1 May 1972, when seventy-eight dacoits laid down their arms at the feet of Jayaprakash and the Chief Minister at Gwalior, the total number of outlaws, or *baghi bhais* as J.P. had addressed them, who had surrendered to the Sarvodaya leader's 'change of heart' mission numbered 267.

Like Father Flannegan of *Boy's Town* in the U.S. who held that 'no boy was a bad boy', it was Jayaprakash's proposition that 'no one is a criminal by birth but due to circumstances some

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become so'. In a long article on 'Crime and Punishment' which he wrote in *Everyman's* on 15 December 1973, J.P. expounded this philosophy:

Yesterday I came by a copy of *Sarvodaya*. In it there was a quotation from Gandhiji. And I found that he had put very succinctly the point that I have been trying to make. He said that all jails should be hospitals. Crime is a disease and the criminal is a diseased person. This disease is not hereditary; it is not transmitted from father to son; a criminal is not born a criminal. He acquires the disease from society. There is so much exploitation, inequality, injustice, dishonesty and corruption in society. It is futile to try to reform the criminal without doing anything about reforming society. The effort is bound to fail. The police will fail and we will all fail.

There are only two ways of dealing with crime. One is through violence; cowing down the criminal by inflicting injuries on him—both physical and mental—which only degrade further both the criminal and his keeper. The other is through love; touching his heart and appealing to his reason.

From this, Jayaprakash moved on to a broader philosophical issue, namely, the issue of the inter-locking of means and ends. Jayaprakash referred to the communist thesis about the State withering away and pointed out why—because there was a wide gap between their ends and their means and the two were mutually contradictory—they had lost. He observed:

The Russian Revolution took place in November 1917. It is now fifty-six years since the revolution. How far has Russia advanced towards a stateless society during these fifty-six years? Even today there is no freedom there. There is far greater freedom of press and platform even in our country. In Russia, their greatest scientist, Sakharov, their greatest writer, Solzhenitsyn, are even today subjected to persecution and, for all you know, may soon be put behind bars. The two are international celebrities. One has already won the Nobel Prize. All the eighty-five living Nobel Laureates all over the world have appealed to the Russian Government to spare them. Sakharov is one of the topmost scientists of the world. He is the father of the Russian atom bomb. Whether

it is Russian nuclear power or space exploration or moon landing—all of it derives from the researches and work of Sakharov. Such a man is hunted in Russia fifty-six years after the glorious revolution.

Gandhiji's means on the other hand were in harmony with the ends. For him, means and ends were indistinguishable which is why he said that 'means are ends'. 'I am a humble social worker' wrote Jayaprakash. 'I have learned something from social sciences and something from Gandhi and Vinoba and have formed a general idea how to reform and change society. But so far as reforming and changing man is concerned, I cannot go further with others than I have gone with myself in changing myself.'

In June 1972, I interviewed J.P. about his work with the dacoits for the *Illustrated Weekly of India*. In the course of his replies to my queries, J.P. made some rather interesting comparisons between the dacoits he had emancipated and the Indian businessman and the politician. When I asked him somewhat facetiously who he found the more intractable—the dacoits or the businessmen in whom we had jointly tried to arouse a sense of social responsibility—J.P. replied: 'I think it is the businessmen who are the more intractable. That is how we have this creeping disease called Statism in India today.'

That his disillusionment with politicians was just as deep became clear when I made a reference to the suggestion made by a journalist that Madhao Singh, the leader of the dacoits, should stand for Parliament and asked J.P. somewhat mischievously whether, in that event, Madhao Singh would not be in good company. J.P. demurred gravely and said dryly: 'He would probably not be in good company, Minoo, because *he* would be a reformed dacoit.'

Presidentship

It has been the fashion on the eve of each election of the President of the Republic for someone to fly the kite that J.P. should be nominated for election as President of the Republic. This had already happened on two occasions and, on each occasion, J.P. had to make it quite clear that he was not in the running. Once again, in the beginning of 1974, the usual speculation started and there were press reports of various suggestions that J.P. should be

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drafted for the Presidential election which was shortly due. On 14 February, J.P. thought it was necessary to announce at a public meeting he was addressing that he was not in the running for the Presidentship. 'If J.P. wanted to be President or Prime Minister', he quipped, 'he could have become some years ago. I have learnt my lessons from Gandhi and Lenin.'

Prabhavati's Death

J.P.'s adoption of the Sarvodaya philosophy in the mid-fifties had led to an identity of views between J.P. and his wife Prabhavati who had been one of Gandhiji's devotees and had attended to Gandhiji for many years as an inmate of his ashram. Now at last J.P. had come to worship at the same shrine and Prabhavati was happy. Though still her unassuming self, she began to take more interest in J.P.'s public activities. Her long association with Gandhiji had made her both an efficient secretary and a trained personal attendant. It was she who protected J.P. from undue harassment, looked after his diet and his rest, as much as he would permit, saw to it that he remembered and kept his engagements, and generally kept some order in his tumultuous life.

In a misguided attempt to save J.P. from additional worry when his own health was frail, she had hidden from him and everyone else certain signs of trouble within her own system. When at last this came to light and was diagnosed, the dreaded judgement of cancer was passed. Despite treatment and an operation at the Tata Memorial Hospital in Bombay, Prabhavati passed away on 15 April 1973. Never before had J.P. been or looked as forlorn. Her letters to him he had not kept, but he told me that he cried unabashedly when he read his own letters to her through the years which she had meticulously filed and retained.

J.P.'s own health had been none too satisfactory. In 1971 he had suffered his first mild heart attack but he soon recovered. It was then announced that he would retire completely from all political activities and public life for a year from October 1972 when he would reach the age of 70. I wrote to him suggesting that it would be much more sensible that he should start his year of retirement immediately in view of his health and get back to activity in October 1972. J.P., however, went ahead with his original plans.

On 9 October 1972, J.P. left Patna for his own home town

of Sitabdiara for his year's vacation from public life. In November, he developed a carbuncle and had to be shifted to Sir Sunderlal Hospital at Banaras Hindu University for treatment. It was there that Prabhavati's own ailment was diagnosed and the roles of patient and nurse were reversed. For the next few months, it was J.P. who nursed Prabhavati till the end came.

3 *The Challenge*

The question is often asked why Jayaprakash eschewed active politics and resisted, till the end of 1973, the many calls that his friends made on him to enter the fray actively to save India from disaster by reversing the trend of Statism and misgovernment which had set in, and why, at long last, he emerged from his semi-retirement and immediately became the centre of the maelstrom

This development was almost in the nature of a *volte face*. In a statement made on 28 October 1972, Jayaprakash announced that he had retired from public life for a full year which would end with his next birthday on 11 October 1973. He went so far as to say that he should be left alone and might not reply to letters—‘I want to be left absolutely alone so that I can rest, do some thinking, writing and reading.’ Yet, on 8 April 1974, J.P. was to be found at the head of an impressive and dignified silent march in Patna and he presided a few days later over a Convention in Delhi which brought into existence a new organisation called ‘Citizens for Democracy’. Why and how did the pendulum swing all the way from complete retirement to complete commitment within eighteen months?

The best way to understand this phenomenon would perhaps be to have a look at the ‘state of the nation’, as the Americans like to describe it, or a *tour d’horizon* as the French would call it. What is the state of India twenty-five years after the establishment of the Republic? What is her position on the plane of economics, politics and public morality? Since the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in an interview with two Bangladesh journalists given on 15 May 1974, said, ‘it is really the economic difficulties which urge political movements and agitations’, perhaps that would be the best starting point.

Economic Collapse

It has been said in another context that yesterday’s crisis is

last night's bad dream and today's faded memory. Alas, the crisis that India is facing is not *that* kind of crisis. A few years ago, Air India, which has a flair for putting out amusing and attractive posters, displayed one on the eve of New Year and it was so apt that I stopped my car and scribbled down the text which read: 'Income Tax, Super Tax, Surcharge, Wealth Tax, Gift Tax, Estate Duty, Corporation Tax, 'P' Form, prohibition, water shortage, housing shortage, power shortage, food shortage, population explosion, language problem—A HAPPY NEW YEAR!' Many people who read the poster felt that this was not at all an inaccurate description of the state of affairs then—nor is it now.

Let us try to break this overall grim picture into its constituents. First, there is the population explosion. Hungry mouths and idle hands proliferate at such a fantastic rate that by 2000 A.D. we shall have touched the 1000 million mark.

On the other hand, there is massive unemployment. The official figures given by B.K. Nehru, then Governor of Assam and now High Commissioner in the U.K.—and he ought to know—in the Madon Memorial Lectures were that in 1970 there were 14 million unemployed. According to his calculations, if current economic policies and plans continued, another 23 million unemployed would be added to the scrap heap in the seventies. In 1980, there would be 37 million unemployed. Mr. Nehru calculated that this means that, every day, 6000 more persons are being added to those who are already unemployed.

Inflation is accelerating and is in danger of getting completely out of control. Within two years of the General Elections in March 1971, the price index had gone up by 25 per cent. The year 1974 exceeded all records by registering a rise in prices estimated to be between 25 and 30 per cent.

The much vaunted 'Green Revolution' has fizzled out except in the Punjab and Haryana. This year, in order to avert famine, press reports say that the Government of India has indented to import foodgrains of the order of six million tonnes. Where the money to pay for all this is going to come from, the Government alone knows. Even so, the availability of cereals per head has dropped from 418.8 grammes in 1965 to 409.6 grammes in 1971.

The sum total of these indices is reflected in the poverty of the people. According to Professors V.M. Dandekar and Neelakantha Rath of the Gokhale Institute in Poona, 40 to 50 per cent of the

Indian people live below the poverty line. The poverty line is defined as an income of less than Rs. 40 per month. Looking ahead, they see little hope. In their opinion,

if the present pattern of planning and present policies continue, it will take more than 25 to 35 years beyond 1980-81, that is well into the 21st century, before the second poorest 10% of the rural people reach a minimum desirable consumption standard. The lowest 10% will not reach it even then.

The causes of this economic collapse are not far to seek. At the risk of over-simplifying a little it can be said that they lie in the counter-productive economic policies followed ever since Independence and particularly since the Plan Frame for the Second Five Year Plan in the mid-fifties was imposed on the country by Professor P.C. Mahalanobis, a member of several Communist Party fronts in this country, with three planners from the Gosplan in Moscow, a Polish Communist and a French Communist.

What was basically wrong with the pattern of the Five Year Plans since they were imposed on India has been not only the dogma of Statism—by which on doctrinaire grounds the State sector of the economy has been bolstered up, even while it was making losses, while the private sector, which was making profits, was constantly put down and penalised,—but a wrong order of priorities was established which put heavy industry first, consumer goods next and agriculture last.

The farmers of India and their rights were consistently treated with a hostility characteristic of Marxists throughout the world. Irrigation, India's primary need, was shamefully neglected and money that should have gone into the digging of tube wells was swallowed up by the 'white elephants' of steel and heavy engineering plants. All this has led not only to injustice to the farmers of India, who are its back-bone, but also to the threat of starvation, growing unemployment and galloping inflation.

All this was done in the name of 'Socialism' but this was a socialism imported from Moscow and had nothing in common with the Social Democracy represented by Willy Brandt of West Germany or Lee Kuan Yew, the Socialist Prime Minister of Singapore.

Political Repercussions

The economic deterioration has naturally been reflected, as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi told visiting Bangladesh journalists on 15 May 1974, in the political climate and developments. But quite independently of the impact of economic deterioration, the democratic system, which is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic brought into force in 1950, has also been slowly grinding to a stop. The archaic system of elections of 'first past the post' adopted from Britain, which is more worthy of a race course than of political life, has made nonsense of popular rule in India. For a quarter of a century now, India has been ruled by one party. That is bad enough. What is worse, however, is that that party never got, in a single election since 1950, a majority of the votes polled. The highest percentage of votes obtained by the ruling party was 48 per cent. This minority government has not only ruled the country for the past twenty-five years without a break in the face of the opposition of a majority of the citizens; it has even misused this power to change the Constitution and eat into the Fundamental Rights of the citizen and of the Judiciary.

The lack of balance in our parliamentary institutions has made for autocratic and irresponsible government on the one side, and indisciplined and equally irresponsible opposition parties driven to desperation by their own impotence and disunity on the other. To further bedevil this situation, there has been the practice of the cult of personality.

The tender plant of Democracy, so new to this country, has never taken root because, while the political parties and parliamentary institutions have floated on top, they have not been sustained by an infrastructure of grass-roots institutions, initiative and vigilance.

Moral Deterioration

The politicisation of the entire national life, including even fields such as education and sport, and the combination of political and economic power which has resulted from statist policies over two decades and more, has bred massive corruption in every walk of life. Milovan Djilas's thesis about the 'New Class' is true of India except that, having a mixed economy, the 'New Class' in India is

a mixed class consisting of corrupt politicians and officials and corrupt businessmen who collaborate with them. This vested interest, the only one that we know, has feathered its nest at the cost of the mass of the people. The smuggler, the blackmarketeer, the hoarder and the tax evader are products of these counter-productive policies which fly in the face of both the laws of economics and of human nature. Since the shooting squads in the Soviet Union have, after fifty years, exterminated neither *blatt* (corruption) nor the *tolkachi* (spiv), it is clear that no amount of governmental controls can suppress these evils. Even the intelligentsia have been corrupted by State patronage. Mr. Nirad Chaudhari, one of the most courageous of our intellectuals, wrote about this in January 1969:

Where do contemporary Indian writers stand in the light of these ideals? I cannot say they are not involved in current affairs. On the contrary, I would assert they are only too much involved in them which means that they are wrongly involved. Most of them are doing their best to have a share of the loot of public money that has become the vocation of the upper middle class since Independence. All of them are enlisting or trying to enlist in the horde of Pindaris that the present ruling order of India is. The writers in this army will not indeed be Amir Khans or Chittus but they aspire to become quite prosperous thugs.

Jayaprakash, talking in Bombay after his release from prison at the end of World War II, had observed that he would judge a social system by the kind of human beings it produced. By that yardstick, he rejected the socialism of the Soviet Union because of its failure to produce more decent, fraternal and civilised human beings. What he saw instead were men of the type of Vyshinsky, Molotov and Beria.

What kind of result would be given by a similar test applied to twenty-five years of the 'Socialist' regime in India? Even a cursory look at those in power in Delhi and State capitals gives a clear but grim picture. According to a paper presented to the Psychology Section of the 62nd Session of the Indian Science Congress which met in Delhi on 6 January 1975, Indians today are 'more cruel, dishonest, corrupt, treacherous, materialistic, crude and complex' than they were before Independence. This was the result of questions put to a random sample of a group of fifty government

officials in the age group of 24 to 45.

J.P. had given up party politics in the belief that gentle persuasion would bring about a revolution of conscience and a social renaissance. In the meanwhile, Bhoodan had proved a relative failure and the Indian body politic was itself continuing to get further corrupted. J.P. continued to react to Nehru's policies, expressing dissent whenever he found them morally incorrect. But he could not yet believe that India's hard-won freedom was being gradually subverted by political manipulators and by a power-hungry administration which had increasingly fewer scruples and decreasing concern for the Indian masses.

After Nehru's and Shastri's death, Mrs. Indira Gandhi became India's Prime Minister. J.P. was then to receive a succession of shocks. He protested against the rapid erosion of civil liberties, against increasing corruption in high offices. He pleaded for electoral reform. He realised that, after winning independence, India had begun to lose freedom. Yet somehow J.P. waited, almost in the Mahabharata style, for the last straw.

I had occasion to ask Jayaprakash once why he waited all this time to do what he was doing. I said many people were not so critical as they were regretful of the fact that time was running out and that he might have left his great crusade until a little too late. 'Wasn't it obvious to him', they asked me, 'that things were in a very bad way? After all, Rajaji and you formed the Swatantra Party in 1959 and Jayaprakash welcomed it in a way. Why did he not do then, or even a little later, what he is doing now?' This was J.P.'s answer:

This is a fair question to ask. Many people have asked me the same question. I look upon this movement as the beginnings of a revolution. I have been saying that no leader in history, no matter how great, whether it was Lenin, Mao or Gandhi made a revolution. Revolutions happen. All that the leader does is to give it direction and control it. Otherwise it dissipates itself and there is a reaction. In the sixties I do not think the situation was ripe nor were the people ready. Jawaharlal's towering personality was still on the scene. After that Shastri came and there was the Pakistan war. He also emerged as some kind of hero and there was still some kind of euphoria during this period. And then Mrs. Gandhi came and there were great expectations from her.

The situation in the country was getting worse and worse economically and otherwise. Mrs. Gandhi had excuses in the earlier part of her rule that there were conservatives in the Congress Party who were standing in the way like Morarji Desai and others due to whom she was not able to deliver the goods. A split was engineered and then she emerged, as far as the people were concerned, as a great hero. An avatar of Durga or something like that somebody called her. Those big people who had dominated the scene in Indian politics were thrown out—S.K. Patil, Kamaraj, Atulya Ghose, Morarji Desai and the rest. And the nationalisation of fourteen banks was announced in one day. Then there was the *Garibi Hatao* slogan. So she came on a wave—the Indira wave. I don't think anything could then have been possible, because people were looking to Delhi and expecting things. In between there was the war situation.

The situation today has been created not only because of the fast deteriorating economic conditions of the people but the moral decline in public life as a whole, the deterioration in the educational system as also the rise in unemployment, particularly among the educated.

The *Garibi Hatao* slogan completely failed because, as the Prime Minister pointed out, *Garibi* had increased during the last fourteen years. The distance between the rich and the poor has also grown, so has unemployment grown both of the educated and the uneducated and there has been disappointment, disillusionment and disenchantment with Mrs. Gandhi. The situation was ripe.

So this is a situation that was created. All I can take credit for is that I *did* recognise that a revolutionary situation had arisen and something had to be done.'

By July 1972 Jayaprakash had started giving expression to his growing disquiet. In a press interview published on 22 July 1972, he said that he felt

a great deal of pessimism because of the fact that there is a very rapid erosion in the democratic values as also social values of life . . . The danger of authoritarianism has been growing and this would affect the democratic structure. The weakness of the opposition parties and centralisation of power not only in the hands of one party but in the hands of one person—these trends are

really depressing to me as a democrat....

As a socialist, my picture of socialism certainly is very very different. Today possibly Statism or bureaucratic socialism is developing. One cannot be happy at the increased economic power of the State. There should be decentralisation of political and economic powers....

It has no inner strength. It has become possible for the Prime Minister to hand-pick Chief Ministers who may or may not have the faith of the majority in the legislature. This is no good for democracy, and this is a trend that depresses me greatly.

When the senior judges of the Supreme Court were superseded by the President acting on the advice of the Prime Minister, J.P. issued a press statement deplored the arbitrary way in which this action had been taken and asking for constitutional safeguards to restrain the Prime Minister and Parliament from interfering with the independence of the Judiciary without which the very foundations of our democracy would be in danger of being totally destroyed.

By the end of 1972, Jayaprakash felt the need to sponsor an English language weekly to be published from New Delhi as from Republic Day, 26 January 1973. However, it was not till July 1973 that the journal in fact made its first appearance. Elaborating on the policy of *Everyman's*, Jayaprakash, who was the Chairman of the Editorial Board, announced that it was not wedded to any ism—whether left, right or centre.

'No' to Patnaik

In February 1973, Mr. Biju Patnaik, President of the Utkal Congress in Orissa, approached Jayaprakash with a view to securing his good offices in promoting the formation of an all-India organisation of opposition parties as an alternative to the Congress Party. Mr. Patnaik met J.P. at Calcutta on 11 February 1973, but was unable to persuade the Sarvodaya leader to depart from his reluctance to lead or identify himself with such a Front. This was the first but not the last time that this 'crown' was to be offered to J.P. and to be firmly turned down.

On the following day, Jayaprakash said at a news conference that he had told Mr. Patnaik that 'while he was interested for the

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sake of the country in the promotion of a viable opposition, he would neither take the initiative nor be part of it'. He would, however, be available for consultation and advice.

J.P. then went on to make four propositions 'that must be kept in mind by those who may be working for a viable opposition party'. These were that an effective opposition must necessarily represent forces of radical change while adhering strictly to peaceful and democratic means; that the consolidation of the opposition forces must be 'principled and not opportunistic'; that the sad spectacle of the coalition governments of 1967 to 1969 should never be repeated; and that the proposed opposition should never be consumed by mere negative aims such as 'Indira Hatao' but place before the people positive policies and programmes.

Thus Jayaprakash laid the foundation for a decision to which he firmly adhered in spite of pressures that were put on him, the last such occasion being in November 1974, in Delhi, when the crown was offered to him for the third time and for the third time, like Julius Ceasar, he turned it down.

An Appeal to the Prime Minister

On 9 June 1973, the Prime Minister wrote a letter to Jayaprakash referring to his earlier letter of 16 May. While appreciating Jayaprakash's assurance of personal friendliness and his assertion of the right to dissent, she urged that 'equally indispensable is a readiness to shoulder responsibilities in order to fulfill the dreams of a people'. She also denied that the independence of the Judiciary had been undermined.

In his reply to the Prime Minister of 27 June 1973, Jayaprakash claimed that the points raised in her letter had 'little relevance'. He went on to say:

I have not said anything against change, nor have I pleaded for the rights to property, because I do not consider these to be fundamental in the same sense as the rights to freedom of expression and association. In fact, I would be happy if property rights were separated from fundamental rights, though the values and norms of democracy would still require that the powers of the executive to interfere with property, even in the public interest, be appropriately regulated by law.

Nor, again, have I upheld any convention, either that of seniority or any other, including the one recommended, by the Law Commission. My plea is a very simple one: there being a national consensus—with the government, the opposition and public opinion agreeing—that the independence of the judiciary must be preserved. It is necessary to provide in the Constitution appropriate procedures to secure that objective. In respect to the appointment of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, which is only a part of the question of independence of the judiciary, the present position is that the Prime Minister (acting of course through the President) is completely free to appoint anyone he or she may wish. Even the President of the U.S.A., who in certain respects is more powerful constitutionally than the Prime Minister of India, does not enjoy such unlimited power in this respect. It is curious that in appointing judges of the Supreme Court, the Constitution should require the President, i.e., the Prime Minister, to follow a certain procedure of consultation, but that he should have untrammelled authority in appointing the Chief Justice. It should be obvious that as long as the seniority convention lasted, no question of procedure arose.

The simple fact is, as I have said in my statement, that if the appointment of the Chief Justice of India remains entirely in the hands of the Prime Minister of India, as has been the case in the present instance, then the highest judicial institution of this country cannot but become a creature of the government of the day.

I cannot conceive of any person, committed to democracy, disagreeing with this simple proposition. It is not a question of doubting your or any one else's good faith. No individual or party can remain in power for all times. When we make laws, more so the fundamental law of the land, we have to think not of ourselves but of the generations to come.

Coming to your remarks about what I have said in my statement about the competing rights of democracy and socialism, I would again submit that 'we' should cease to think in terms of 'ourselves' being in power forever. You say that 'It has been our endeavour through our struggle for freedom and during these twenty-five years as an independent nation to reconcile the two. I am perhaps more confident than you that we can achieve this reconciliation.'

Suppose I grant you that, what guarantee is there that another

government with other ideas of democracy and socialism will also be able to reconcile the two?

Here also my plea is quite simple. The Supreme Court has decided that Parliament has powers even to abrogate the fundamental rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, association movement, etc. My plea is that Parliament must agree to provide for constitutional constraints upon its own power, so as to prevent another Parliament in the future whose commitment to democracy may not be particularly strong and whose concept of socialism may be very different from that of the present Government from extinguishing the fundamental freedoms of the citizen and establishing a dictatorship. The argument that no Constitution can stand in the way of the people's will, which more often than not means the will of a minority of determined and ruthless political manipulators usually backed by the force of arms, betrays defeatism and confusion of thought on the part of those arguing in this manner, or it heralds the infiltration of Trojan horses into the ranks of democratic socialists.

It was in view of these considerations that I had appealed to you as Prime Minister to appoint a Parliamentary committee to go into these questions and report to Parliament which might enact the necessary laws and constitutional amendments.

My statement to you was an 'earnest appeal' to you, and if your letter is your considered response to that appeal, I can only confess to a sense of utter disappointment and deep distress. Is it a vain hope that you may still be persuaded to give further thought to this vital and far reaching question?

It was not till December 1973, however, that Jayaprakash felt it necessary to release this letter to the press.

Open Letter to M.P.s.

In December 1973, J.P. also published in *Everyman's* an open letter to Members of Parliament in which he addressed the M.P.s on two questions which he considered to be of the greatest importance. The first of these related to the Fundamental Rights of the citizen and the independence of the Judiciary, and the second had reference to political and administrative corruption. Protesting that 'if the appointment of the Chief Justice of India remains entirely

in the hands of the Prime Minister of India, then the highest judicial institution of this country cannot but become a creature of the government of the day', Jayaprakash urged that a parliamentary committee be appointed to examine the entire question and make considered recommendations to the Government and Parliament.

Jayaprakash then turned to the subject of corruption which was, from then on, to become a recurring theme in his pronouncements. 'All political parties', he wrote,

seem to be agreed that corruption anywhere but particularly in the political and administrative sphere, is like poison to the country, and it must be severely curbed if not eradicated completely. The only difference between them is about the degree of corruption and the sphere of its prevalence.

He then proceeded to say:

If you, the representatives of the people, do not bestir yourselves now and take urgent steps in this matter, you will not only be betraying the people's trust, but will also be proving that your talk of socialism, democracy, removal of poverty, is a sham and an insult to the common people.

J.P. ended his letter with a plea to both the ruling party and the opposition parties to put their partisan interests aside and approach this task with the national interest alone in their minds.

By the beginning of 1974, Jayaprakash had come round to the view that it was time for a change. Speaking in Kanpur on 3 February, he said he was able to look ahead and see that 'there is another 1942 movement in sight to change the course of history'. Later events were to prove that he was not a bad diagnostician.

The Impact of Gujarat

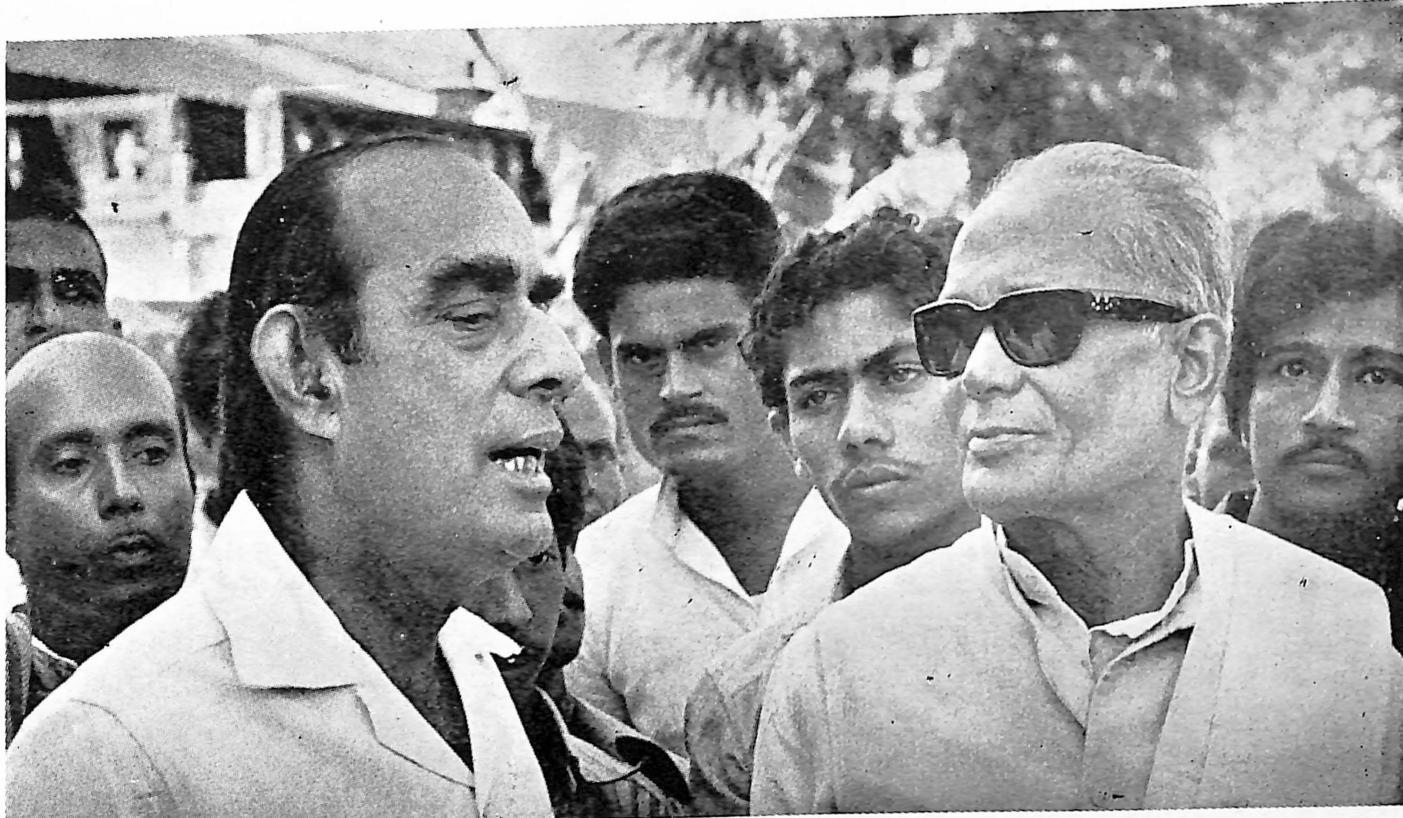
In February 1974, Jayaprakash visited Gujarat to meet the Nav Nirman Samiti students, teachers and Sarvodaya workers and to study the situation that had developed in that State where the students were demanding the removal of the corrupt State Government and the dissolution of the State Assembly. Addressing a 'Lok Swaraj Sammelan' convened by the Gujarat Sarvodaya Mandal on

13 February, Jayaprakash advised students, teachers and Sarvodaya workers to approach the electorate and convince it of the need to put moral pressure on the M.L.A.s to resign. He said: 'With the building of the popular demand the Assembly will have to be dissolved. He urged the students to refrain from forcibly obtaining resignations of M.L.A.s by 'gherao' or shouting slogans at their residence. He appealed to college students to give up their classes for a year and work for a 'Youth Revolution'. He said that it was possible that the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh and Swatantra might stage a come-back after the elections and described this as a backward step. J.P. urged the students: 'You have to be the watchdogs for assuring the people of a decent living.'

According to Mr. Radhakrishna of the Gandhi Peace Foundation in Delhi, 'he came, he saw, he conquered' might be a fair description of Jayaprakash's visit to Ahmedabad. Jayaprakash, according to him, praised and chided the students alternately, and they listened to him in pin-drop silence. But he had to leave for his own State of Bihar and, though the State Assembly was later dissolved as he had forecast, the students, alas, drifted back to college and there was nothing left in Gujarat except President's rule on the one side and a people's vacuum on the other.

There can be no doubt that Jayaprakash saw in Ahmedabad a ray of hope in student and people's power. Much as he might have disapproved of the methods used, he admired the courage of the youth and students of Gujarat but he also regretted that, after the dissolution of the State Assembly, the Nav Nirman Samiti agitation had just withered away.

His visit to Ahmedabad made him aware of both the strong and the weak points of Gujarat. In case Jayaprakash wondered why the students and the people of Bihar did not, like those of Gujarat, bring their Government and legislators to book, he did not have long to wait. Soon the students of Patna and Bihar were to come to Jayaprakash and ask for his guidance and leadership. This started a dialogue between him and the students of Bihar which has not yet concluded.

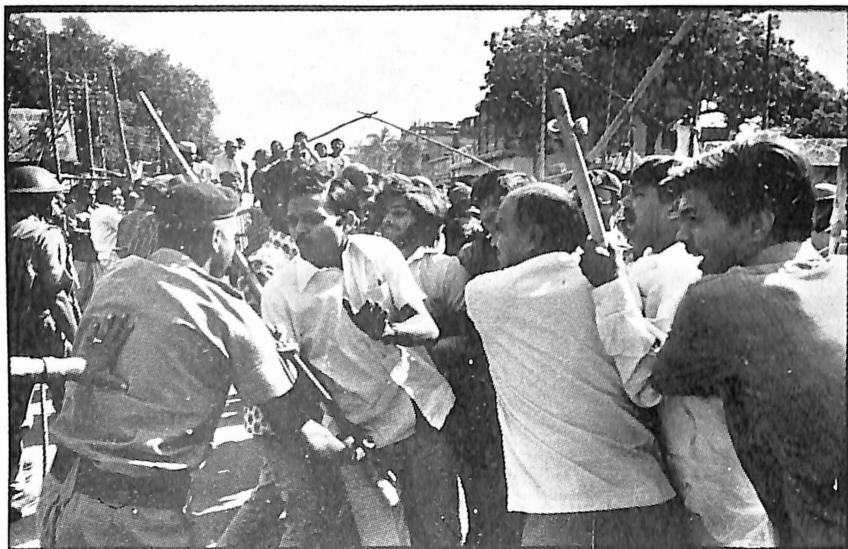


The Author with J. P. in Patna on 3 November 1974

[Photo: Raghu Rai, *Statesman*]

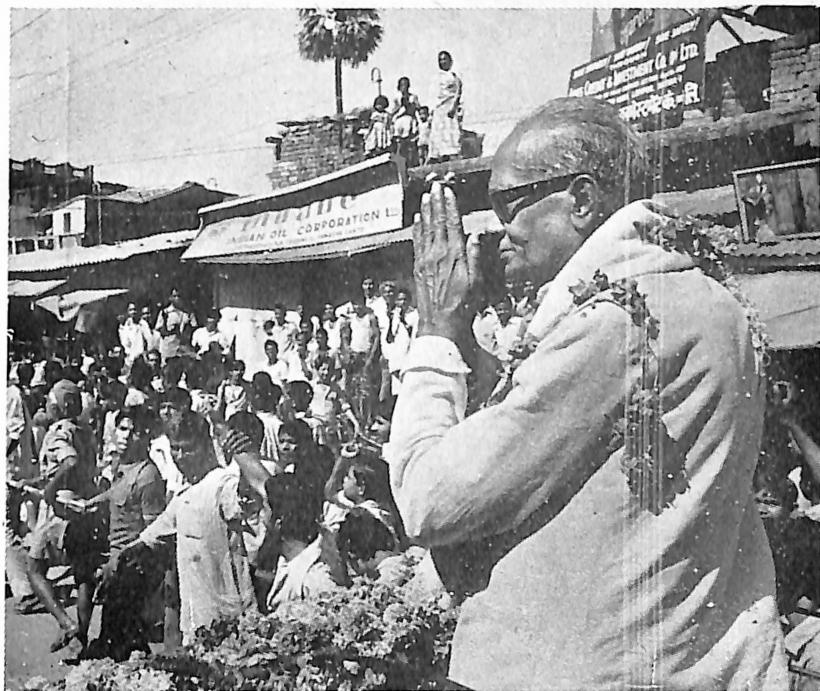


[Photo: R. K. Sharma, *Indian Express*

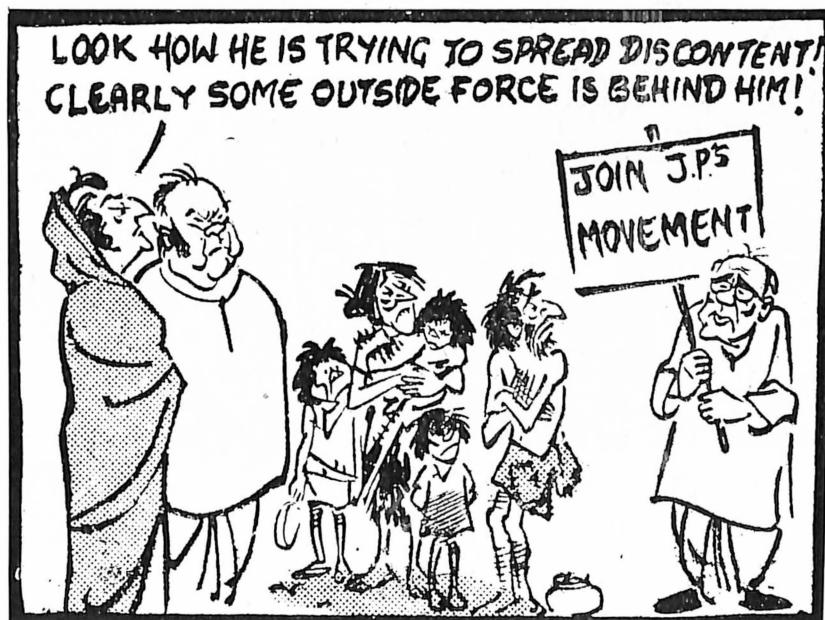


[Photo: Raghu Rai, *Statesman*

Patna: 4 November 1974



[Photo: Raghu Rai, *Statesman*
Patna: 4 November 1974



[Cartoon by Laxman: Courtesy *Times of India*



[Cartoon by Laxman: Courtesy *Times of India*



[Photo: *Times of India*
J.P. addressing Press Conference in
New Delhi on 24 October 1974



[Photo: R. K. Sharma, *Indian Express*

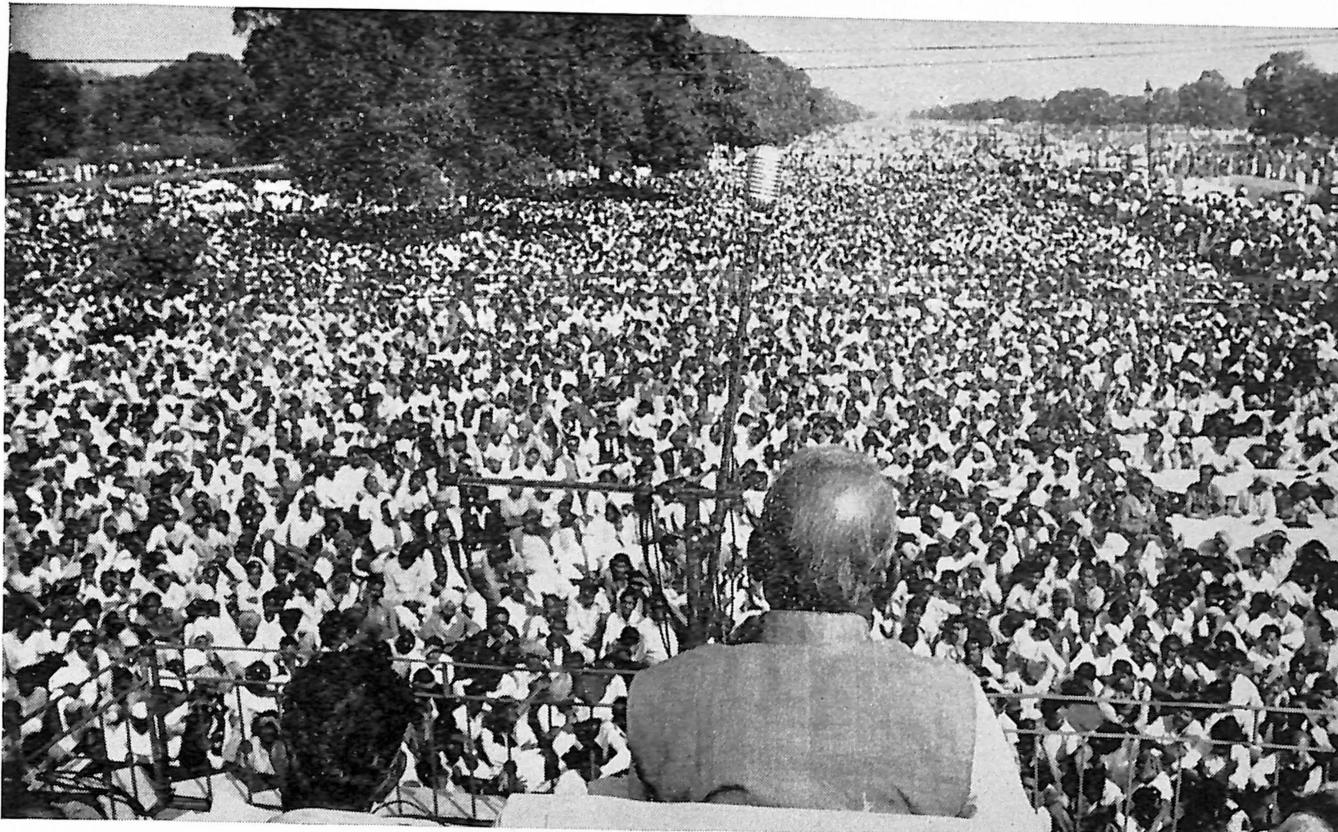
The Tea Party: J. P. with some Congress Members of Parliament at the residence of
K. Chandrasekhar, 20 November 1974



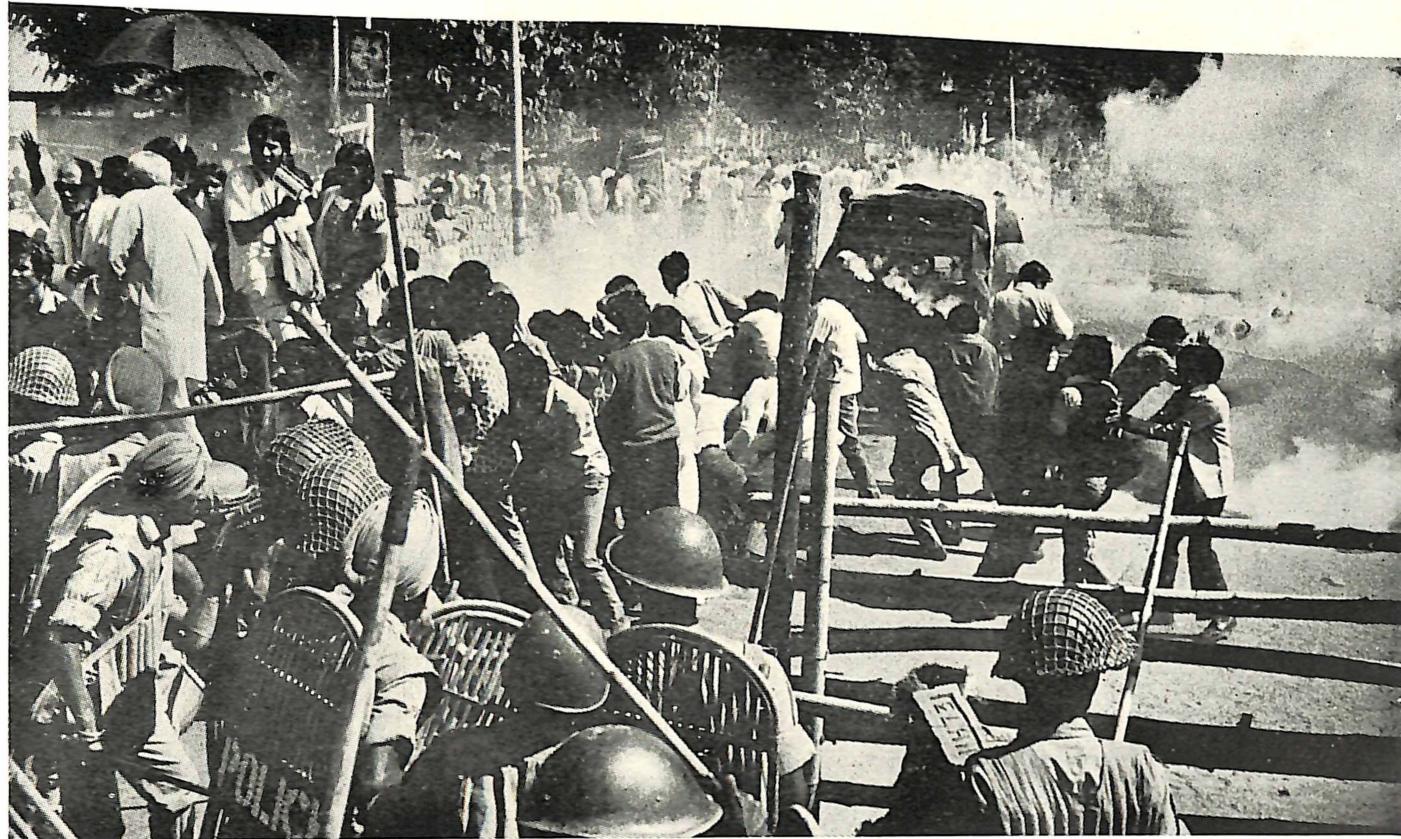
Excellent oration! Did you hear that? —“We shall fight him by land, we shall fight him by sea, we shall fight him in the air...!”



[Cartoons by Laxman: Courtesy *Times of India*



6 March 1975: J. P. addressing processionists at the Boat Club, New Delhi.
[Photo: *Times of India*]



[Photo: Raghu Rai, *Statesman*

Patna: 4 November 1974

4 *The Aims*

‘It is not failure but low aim that is a crime’ is an old adage. ‘Low aim’ is certainly not one of the crimes of which Jayaprakash’s campaign can be accused. It is pitched at the highest level of ‘total revolution’ which obviously means a change at all levels and in all facets of life. It is not only a political change, an economic change or an educational change, but a change in man himself. And who can deny that this is a legitimate aim when it is well accepted that what India is suffering from above all is a lack of national character.

Some time ago Jayaprakash had wondered, writing in the *Radical Humanist*, how democracy could have at all survived in India despite what it had to contend with. To him it was ‘nothing short of a miracle’. Noting that ‘galloping corruption’ had pervaded every aspect of national life, he asked: ‘Can a nation without moral fibre survive?’ and answered: ‘It is not for the politicians alone to give the answer; it is for every one of us.’

Gandhiji, in his conception of Swaraj, had already prepared the ground for this kind of total revolution. He had protested that Swaraj was not to mean a replacement of a white bureaucracy by a brown bureaucracy.

It is significant that, in a similar situation in Africa, there has arisen a similar call for ‘the interior liberation of man’. Basil Davidson in his book *Liberation of Guinea* had referred to ‘the fruitlessness of a nationalist struggle which aimed merely or mainly at putting Africans into controlling jobs held by Europeans. . . . They found themselves invited to presidential or ministerial receptions and conferences where nothing changed except the outward trappings and the colour of official skins. They watched the flow of national liberation vanish in the sands of popular disillusionment.’ Cabral had protested that ‘to be masters of our destiny, that’s not simply a question of having African ministers’.

‘One step’, Gandhiji used to say, ‘is enough for me’ echoing a line from the hymn *Abide With Me*. Jayaprakash was to repeat

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this at a Press Club luncheon in New Delhi on 31 October 1974. In the ten months that had elapsed since the campaign began, Jayaprakash had, as the phrase goes, 'played it by ear', broadening and escalating the movement and its objectives as he had gone along.

Total Revolution

The aims of the campaign grew in response to the efforts made by the Government in Bihar and in Delhi to suppress it. They snowballed, but on the core of the movement and its fundamental aims Jayaprakash was clear and constant. It was not a mere change of government but a change of the system itself. 'We want the entire system changed; we do not want the ruling party to be simply replaced by the Jan Sangh or the BLD', said Jayaprakash in one of his speeches. He told the All India Youth Conference in Allahabad in U.P. on 22 June 1974:

My interest is not in the capture of power but in the control of power by the people. People now have only one right left, the right to vote. If that also is denied or falsified, what remains? In countries where democracy has developed an infrastructure, there are many checks on those in power; the press, the academic institutions, the intellectuals. There is strong public opinion. We have no such foundations and we will take time to develop them. I wish to give the people's movement a revolutionary direction so that the people can develop their own power and become the guardians of democracy.

In January 1975 he told a press correspondent that the aim of the total revolution is 'a radical, social, economic, political, educational, cultural and ethical change. We are trying to bring about these changes by people's action and this will be a long drawn out process. Therefore, I have called this movement a continuing revolution.'

Himself a rural man, Jayaprakash gave the slogan: '*Naya Bihar banayenge; har gao naya banayenge.*' He asked how there could be a new Bihar without the villages being rejuvenated?

Corruption

Jayaprakash seized on corruption as the aspect of Indian life

which to him was Public Enemy Number One. 'The modern God of India is corruption and the people must try to recognise it in whatever *avatar* it manifests itself', he said addressing a meeting in Bombay on 22 January 1975. He said that the omniscient and omnipotent God, corruption, was all pervasive and all powerful in the country. It had spread its tentacles into politics, education, science, business and agriculture. Not, he elaborated, that the Congress Party alone was a corrupt party. Other parties too were not above board. Even the Sarvodaya movement was not free from corruption, Jayaprakash conceded.

It was not as if he had suddenly awakened to the fact of widespread corruption.

I have been writing about corruption, talking about it for years. I had talks with Indiraji. I sent a printed letter to all members of Parliament about the Supreme Court and Fundamental Rights, also giving suggestions for removing corruption. But for one or two, they were not my personal suggestions but were taken from the reports of the Santhanam Committee, the Administrative Reforms Committee and other sources.

Why is the Anti-Defection Bill hanging fire for the last six years? When they (the Congress Party) really want to do something they use their steam roller majority to get things passed in a matter of days. Take a single instance, that of election expenses, which is the source of great corruption in politics. Crores of rupees, unaccounted money, are collected from black-marketeers. There is no accounting. There are no entries about this money in the accounts of the Congress Party. Nobody knows how the money is spent and by whom.

Jayaprakash demanded the appointment of special commissions headed by persons of the rank of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court at the Centre and of the rank of Chief Justice of the High Court in the States to inquire into charges of corruption against politicians and senior officials. The central Commission should be appointed by the President of India and in the States by Governors. The findings should be published and follow up action taken.

At a meeting of trade union functionaries in Bombay on 25 January 1975, Jayaprakash announced that he intended to open a front to fight corruption in big business, trade and industry.

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Capitalists in this country never had it so good as under Mrs. Gandhi, he declared. The front would be on the lines of the Bihar movement which was directed against 'corruption and bureaucratic socialism of the Government.' He also wanted the workers to cleanse themselves of corrupt practices as were prevalent among themselves and in their Unions.

Economic Aims

What about the economic objectives of the movement? Jayaprakash felt that a detailed economic programme such as that of political parties was not advisable. He told a conference of political leaders and others in Delhi in response to a request that he should spell out an economic programme:

I do think that I and my colleagues have a fair idea of the broad social, economic, political and cultural frame for the movement. This, broadly speaking, is a Gandhian frame laying emphasis on agricultural development, equitable land ownership; the application of appropriate technology to agriculture such as improved labour intensive tools and gadgets of which the *gobar* (gas) plant is a fine example; the development of domestic and rural industries and the widest possible spread of small industries; regional planning and development; political and administrative decentralisation and devolution qualitatively and materially different from the present bogus decentralisation that we have in the shape of *gram panchayats*, *panchayat samitis* and *zilla parishads*; drastic reforms to destroy education's elitist character and relate it to the problems of socio-economic development of the lives of students themselves; and the dismantling of the hierarchical caste structure of Hindu society and also the economic hierarchical structure in a manner that *does not discourage production and create a privileged class of a managerial bureaucracy as we have today.* (Italics Mine)

'Nationalisation in our country', he said on another occasion, 'has not achieved any of the aims of socialism except that of converting private ownership into State ownership. Indeed, it has militated against many socialist aims and values.'

Jayaprakash spent a lot of time discussing the real values of socialism. 'Is it socialism', he asked, 'when dishonest industrialists

and businessmen prosper much more than honest ones?" He explained the difference between socialism and nationalisation, pointing out how, in nationalisation, both individual production and profits went down, the lot of the workers did not improve nor were they allowed to participate. He contrasted this with the state of affairs in Yugoslavia. Capital, he argued, belongs to the people. Management is undertaken by those who work in the factory. Public enterprises too must have social responsibilities.

Social Aims

Jayaprakash has always made it clear that, unlike Marxists and others, he is not content to fight only economic evils. To him social evils were even more important and he has stressed at considerable length the need for social reform. Thus he has attacked the use of caste by political parties for electoral purposes. Many years ago he had anticipated this development by remarking: 'The biggest party in India is caste.' On Republic Day 1975, both at his morning and evening meetings in Bombay, he spent a lot of time dwelling on this subject. He was happy at the discarding of the *janoi* (sacred thread) which had commenced at his meetings in Bihar and he amused his audience by telling them how certain party leaders had come to him and pleaded that he should 'play this down', at least till the next elections, as it would lose them votes!

Jayaprakash is happy and proud that this is the first time since Gandhiji's day that this issue of social reform has been made a major issue in our national life. In that way he harks back to the old liberals who had preceded Mahatma Gandhi.

Jayaprakash illustrated the point that it is not primarily economic disparities but social ones that are particularly pernicious by pointing out how two persons in his own village, one of whom was a Rajput and the other a *sudra*, may have the same quantity of land and the same income and wealth and yet one would be 'superior' to the other. At any social or public function, the Rajput would unhesitatingly go and take his seat on the *takth* or platform while the *sudra* would as readily sit on the ground without experiencing any sense of injustice. In his own village of Sitabdiara, he had to fight for years to make the *sudras* sit on the platform along with the Rajputs. 'This kind of thing', says Jayaprakash, 'can kill socialism.'

Another social evil apart from caste that Jayaprakash fights

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is the institution of dowry. 'If any man', he said, 'participating in this movement or supporting it accepts dowry on his marriage it will be a betrayal of the cause. And total revolution cannot take place in Bihar alone. The whole of Indian society has to be changed.'

Electoral Reform

The reform of the electoral system is another important aim of the campaign. The aim is to strengthen democracy at the grass roots level, to evolve a democratic machinery through which some measure of popular consultation might be possible in the nomination of candidates, to ensure that the legislature fairly represents the various points of view within the electorate, and to provide a machinery to ensure a measure of accountability on the part of the representatives to their constituents.

In pursuit of this aim, Jayaprakash set up a team of six persons consisting of V.M. Tarkunde, Eric da Costa, P.G. Mavlankar, A.G. Noorani, K.D. Desai and myself to go into the mechanics of elections and recommend measures of electoral reform.

Non-violence

'Show us not the aim without the way' a poet had written, pointing to the dangers to the end if the means were not clearly defined. With Gandhiji of course this had been a major theme—the interaction and inter-relation between ends and means. Gandhiji had flatly rejected the idea that 'the end justifies the means', and on those grounds had rejected the Soviet Revolution and all its works.

Jayaprakash has repeatedly drawn attention to the failure of violent revolutions to achieve their aims and has given Soviet Russia and China as examples. Following this line of thought, Jayaprakash has rejected the path of violence and deceit. He prefers to call his method 'peaceful' rather than 'non-violent'. In one of his talks he made a statement that there has never been a non-violent *social* revolution anywhere in the world but there was an example of a non-violent *political* revolution, and that was the one brought about by Gandhiji. 'Every revolution', observed Jayaprakash, 'writes its own text book', indicating that precedents were of little relevance and the essence lay in improvisation.

Jayaprakash believes that the conditions for an armed revolution do not prevail in the country. He referred to the talk of revolution in certain quarters in the name of the peasants and workers and remarked that after seeing what happened in West Bengal, Sundarayya of the C.P.(M) had observed: 'If we do not stick to non-violence, we shall be finished.' Mao Tse-tung had said that 'power came out of the barrel of the gun', but everybody knew that the guns in China were in the hands of the People's Liberation Army and not of the peasants, workers and the common people. In any event, there was no need for violence when the movement had the people's support.

Education

Before Jayaprakash took up the leadership of the Bihar movement, the demands of the students were of the usual kind—mostly to do with facilities such as cheaper textbooks, exemption from fees, and hostel facilities. They also demanded an education which would enable them to secure jobs. But the students' demands underwent a fundamental change in what amounted to a total indictment of the present educational system. While there had been criticism by academics and intellectuals of the kind of education that is being imparted to Indian youth, it was for the first time that the demand for the reform of the educational system in a fundamental way formed part of a mass movement. Basically, the attack was on the present pattern of higher education for a privileged few at the cost of primary education for the large illiterate mass.

The following objectives are among the specific demands for revamping the educational system:

1. A third or half of the working time in all educational institutions at all stages should be devoted to active participation in programmes of social service and national development. These would include such programmes as the liquidation of illiteracy, non-formal education of the out of school group in the age group of 15 to 25 years and the expansion of elementary and pre-school education.
2. Transformation of the present educational structure with the introduction of a large non-formal element. This means programmes of part-time education, correspondence courses, encouraging self-study programmes, etc. All teaching

facilities in the community should be developed and not confined to full time teachers.

3. The de-linking of University degrees and eligibility for public employment.

4. Though Rs. 1350 crores are spent on the educational system only 25 per cent of the age group of 6 to 14 years receive primary education and only 7 per cent in the age group of 15 to 25 years are in secondary schools and colleges. As much as 70 per cent of the total population remains untouched. This distortion must be corrected and the masses must get the full benefit of education.

As *Everyman's* put it, the demand can be summed up in the words: 'Education for the masses, not only for the classes.'

5 *The Phoenix Rises*

That mythical bird, the Phoenix, is fabled to be the only one of its kind. After living for five or six hundred years, it burns itself to ashes on a funeral pyre and emerges from its ashes with renewed youth, to live through another cycle of years. Jayaprakash is, in more ways than one, the Phoenix of contemporary Indian politics.

The first overt act in the Bihar campaign took place on 18 March 1974, the day on which the Bihar State Legislative Assembly was to meet. This was the day chosen by student leaders for launching their campaign against maladministration, rising prices and corruption. The dialogue between the Bihar students and Jayaprakash had, however, already been going on for some time. The students' campaign was neither against the Bihar State Government nor the Union Government. The twelve initial demands listed by them related to educational matters. Other demands were the removal of corruption, bringing down prices and the removal of unemployment among both the educated and the uneducated. It was because of the unresponsive attitude of the Bihar State Government that the students decided to *gherao* the State Assembly on 18 March to persuade the Government to take up their demands more seriously.

The proposal for the removal of the Ghafoor Government and the dissolution of the State Legislative Assembly was put to Jayaprakash by the students a little later. Jayaprakash's initial reaction was not favourable and he tried to discourage this move. He was not particularly interested in short-term political changes of that nature. When, however, he found that the students were keen on enlisting his support for these political demands, he decided to make a deal with them. If he went along with them on these points, would the students agree to leave their colleges for a year and dedicate themselves to the task of building up the organs of people's power from the villages upwards so that the dissolution of the Assembly, if secured, was not wasted and a vacuum created as had happened in the case of Gujarat? It was when the students

responded to this suggestion that Jayaprakash, though with mental reservations, agreed to endorse their call for the resignation of the State Government and the dissolution of the Assembly. And it was only after the State Government refused to order an independent investigation into the police firing in Gaya on 12 April that Jayaprakash told the students that he was now convinced of the legitimacy of these particular demands.

On 18 March, students blocked all approaches to the Assembly in order to prevent members from entering the chamber. In order to avoid this *gherao*, Ministers and many Congress M.L.A.s got into the Assembly premises well before 9 a.m.

There were pitched battles between the 10,000 strong crowd, which was seeking to *gherao* the legislature, and the police. Inside the building, security guards had to fire three shots in order to thwart the attempts of the staff of the Legislative Assembly to manhandle the Members.

The crowd outside was heterogenous in its composition and it is possible that hooligans infiltrated into the crowd. In any event, the residence of Mr. Bishwanath Mishra, Secretary of the Legislative Assembly, whose staff had shown their attitude already, was set ablaze by hooligans while policemen stood nearby. Soon violent mobs were out on a rampage in many parts of Patna. The offices of the Patna Municipal Corporation, the C.I.D., the Tourist Department, the Circuit House and the home of Ramanand Singh, former Education Minister, were set on fire. Policemen opened fire in several places and, according to official estimates, at least three people were killed and over fifty injured. Unofficial estimates, however, placed the number of dead at around a dozen.

During these orgies of violence the premises of the *Searchlight* and the *Pradeep*, leading daily newspapers, were completely destroyed. It was well known that these journals had been highly critical of, and were not held in high affection or esteem by, the State Government. It is on record that the police took an inordinately long time to appear on the scene, even though they were only a short distance away. By the time they arrived the buildings were already gutted. It was clear that the Bihar administration had failed to ensure law and order and protect property if it was not indeed behind these acts of violence.

Jayaprakash was then lying ill in bed awaiting surgery for his enlarged prostate gland. The events of 18 March made a profound

impact on him. Whether the acts of arson were the work of provocateurs connived at by the Government or whether it was sheer neglect of responsibility and failure of administration, Jayaprakash felt gravely concerned and became painfully aware that his leadership was needed to ensure that the people's struggle remained disciplined and non-violent. Jayaprakash was determined not to let the Bihar movement go the way of Gujarat's nor would he tolerate repression. 18 March thus helped him to make up his mind and chart out his course of action.

Writing from his sick bed for *Everyman's* issue of 30 March, Jayaprakash said:

Not only has the *Searchlight*, that beacon of the freedom movement, been destroyed, but much else. It is Bihar's very soul that is torn and bleeding today. I wonder if Bihar will be allowed to be destroyed....

In any democratic country, after such a monumental failure of administration as Patna witnessed on Monday last, the Government would have resigned. But in this country we are past masters in covering up things and making alibis and scapegoats. But it is time we corrected direction....

In a statement issued on 30 March in Patna, Jayaprakash warned the Bihar Government that if they persisted in their policy of the denial of people's right of protest, he himself would lead a procession of *shanti sainiks*, students and other citizens. In a cryptic sentence, he said: 'This will be a beginning, the rest will follow.' He went on to declare passionately: 'It is not for this that I fought for freedom.'

The Union Government's propaganda machinery simultaneously intensified its Goebelian propaganda warfare against Jayaprakash and the line put out was that he was trying to bring down a legally constituted government and was helping to usher in fascism. In an obvious reference to Jayaprakash in a speech made at Bhubaneswar on 1 April, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi went out of her way to ask: 'How can such persons who continue to seek favours from the monied people and keep in constant touch with them dare to speak of corruption?'

In what was described by a newspaper as a blunt riposte to the Prime Minister's remarks about him in Bhubaneswar, Jayaprakash

said on 3 April that he was 'prepared to pay the price for speaking out against the public wrongs of the high and mighty in the land'. In a rejoinder, written more in sorrow than in anger, he urged the Prime Minister not to presume to teach him and the Sarvodaya workers where their duty lay and, in a delightfully apt aside, he asked her not to use 'her proven skill' in 'trying to drive a wedge between me and Vinobaji' and thus split the Sarvodaya movement. He went on patiently to point out that 'no whole-time social worker who has no independent source of income can live without the help of personal friends who have the means'. He pleaded that if the Prime Minister's yardstick were to be applied, 'Gandhiji would be found to be the most corrupt of us all because his entire entourage was supported by his rich admirers'.

Jayaprakash is a man who has never cultivated personal enemies. As it happens, both his wife Prabhavati and he had great personal affection for Indira whom they regarded as their daughter. Prabhavati had been a close friend of Indira's mother, Kamla Nehru, and Jayaprakash once told me how, after Prabhavati had passed away, he had told Indira Gandhi that Prabhavati had preserved all her mother's affectionate letters to her. Jayaprakash, even when he criticised Jawaharlal Nehru, as he had to from time to time, always addressed Nehru as *bhai* (brother) and, despite their differences, the two never quarrelled. One can therefore imagine how deeply Indira Gandhi's uncharitable remarks must have stung Jayaprakash and what a deep scar they must have left.

Yet, on 25 December 1974, when I questioned Jayaprakash as to whether the Prime Minister's remark had made any difference to his conduct and whether his later steps might have been different if she had not made that attack on him, Jayaprakash replied: 'We have been in politics long enough and as you know our communist friends have been vilifying me and calling me all kinds of names. No, I don't think Mrs. Gandhi's attack on me made any difference. I *was* angry and I issued a very strong rejoinder. But there was nothing personal. What I have been doing is nothing against her personally. If, however, she stands in the way of a revolution, she will have to go.'

There were indeed many objective developments after the events of 18 March in Patna which acted as a continuing provocation to Jayaprakash and which would not let him rest even in his bad state of health. Police repression continued, culminating in

police firing on peaceful demonstrators in Gaya on 12 April, killing eight people and injuring fifteen. What shook J.P. particularly was not so much the firing by the police, because this was nothing new in post-independence India, but the refusal to have an objective enquiry. All that the Bihar Government did was to send a single officer of its own who spent one day in Gaya and exonerated the police in an arbitrary fashion. On the other hand, the entire public of Gaya was convinced that the firing was absolutely unjustified. The Gaya Bar Association took out a silent procession in protest asking for suspension of the officers responsible for the firing. They urged the Government to release the lawyers, teachers and students who had been arrested and demanded a judicial enquiry.

Jayaprakash, whose own ashram of Sekhodevra was in Gaya district, and whose bonds with the people of Gaya had been long and close, felt very strongly and proceeded to Gaya himself on 16 April. At the railway station he was welcomed by no less than 50,000 people. Speaking at the Gandhi Maidan to a crowd estimated at 2,00,000, Jayaprakash rejected the idea of a judicial probe and expressed his lack of faith not only in government officials but even in retired judges who sometimes prolonged the period of enquiry in order to earn larger fees. He announced that he would set up a three-man Committee consisting of honest and fearless persons—an advocate, a teacher and a citizen—to go into the causes of the police firing and its justifiability. Subsequently, Jayaprakash announced from Patna a seven-man Commission of enquiry consisting of two former high court judges, a retired district judge and four lawyers.

Even before the tragedy in Gaya, which occurred on 12 April, Jayaprakash had led a silent procession of peace marchers in the State capital on 8 April. The processionists had their lips sealed with pieces of saffron cloth and their hands clasped behind their backs. Jayaprakash himself silently led the procession in a jeep and looked grim throughout the eight kilometre journey.

The processionists carried placards bearing slogans such as: 'Our hearts are filled with sorrow but our tongues are tied', 'We are too overwhelmed to speak', 'Our silence symbolises our firm determination', and 'Whatever be the form of attack on us we will not even lift our little finger'. The procession was organised by the Sarvodaya Mandal, the Tarun Shanti Sena, and the Gandhi Peace Foundation. Practically the entire population of Patna thronged the

streets and cheered the processionists while men and women from housetops and balconies showered flowers and garlands on them. A newspaper the following day captioned its description of this impressive scene as 'Five Miles of Silence'. Similar silent processions were taken out at various district headquarters as an act of silent solidarity. The next day, Jayaprakash broke his silence to say at a mammoth public meeting in Gandhi Maidan that he had 'taken a vow to change the present situation as it has now gone beyond my tolerance. A stage has now come when a flare-up is a must.'

Meanwhile, within the ruling party, there was double talk and confusion and a kind of hot and cold treatment was being developed. When speaking in Poona while inaugurating the silver jubilee celebrations of the Poona University, Mrs. Gandhi called upon the students to fight back and defeat what she described as 'anti-democratic forces' which were out to capture power even by 'endangering the country's freedom'. According to her, these elements were 'deliberately undermining the faith of the people in a democratic set up by creating a situation of economic unrest involving youth in their bid to capture power. They did not seem to care if any number of people lost their lives.' Yet, a newspaper of 21 April was to report from Delhi that the Prime Minister deplored the level of the criticism aimed at Jayaprakash by some Congress Members of Parliament.

Several controversies broke out between the communist fellow-travellers who launched a crusade to question Jayaprakash's bona fides and genuine Congressmen who resented such smears. Already, on 9 April, fifty-one Members of Parliament had issued a statement alleging that any attempt to create a stalemate between Indira Gandhi and Jayaprakash Narayan was desired either by those who did not have the nation's interests at heart or by the corrupt elements in national life searching for refuge. While describing Mrs. Gandhi as the established leader of the country of whom Congressmen were proud, they at the same time said that 'Jayaprakash's integrity, sincerity and patriotism shines through the pages of India's struggle for independence. His honesty and spirit of sacrifice are beyond reproach.' Among the signatories to this statement were Shankar Dayal Singh, Sant Bux Singh and K.C. Pandey. Another Congress Member of Parliament, K. Chandrasekhar, added his own bit to put the record right when he said: 'In the past many a time Jayaprakash has got rebuffs for offering his services to create

healthy conditions in our public life. But now we can miss this opportunity only at our peril.'

Citizens for Democracy

When the shooting in Gaya took place, Jayaprakash was in Delhi engaged in launching a new facet of his activities which transcended the boundaries of Bihar and had a national character. This was the launching of a new organisation entitled 'Citizens for Democracy'. Among its aims and objects are:

To bring together all those who cherish democratic values in all spheres of social, political and economic life and take active steps to preserve and strengthen democracy. It will not be a political party nor will it be a supporter or opponent of any political party. It will strive to guide public opinion by propagating rational and constructive views so as to counteract demagogic and sectarian appeals.

The Conference adopted the following Plan of Action at the Founding Conference at Delhi on 13 and 14 April, with Jayaprakash in the Chair:

- to suggest an alternative to the present electoral system.
- to strive for free and fair elections.
- to create public opinion in favour of freedom and democracy on burning issues of the day.
- to create an awareness of civil liberties among the people and forge instruments at all levels in general and at least at places where courts are situated in particular for defending and enlarging them through all peaceful and legitimate means.
- to strive for clean and healthy public life by launching an anti-corruption movement with specific emphasis on the necessity to expose and eliminate corruption at higher levels of administration and government.
- to involve the people intelligently in the anti-price rise movement so as to enable them to become more aware of the faulty machinations of corrupt officials, dishonest businessmen and be-guiling politicians, and to help create the necessary organisations to protect the interest of the consumers.

- to lay bare the pernicious effects of caste and untouchability in all spheres of public life and to draw the attention of the people to the baneful character of caste and untouchability.
- to lay the foundations for a free and fearless press in regional languages to uphold, preserve, fight for and enlarge democracy.

Vellore

As the date for his departure for Vellore for his operation approached, Jayaprakash was burdened with the thought of what would happen to the cause, not only while he was away from Patna but also in the event of the operation failing and he being no longer there to guide events.

The events in Bihar had agitated his mind considerably and he was now fully involved in the developing situation. At the same time, he was a physically sick and tired man, past seventy and with a heart condition and a long history of diabetes. Since his wife Prabhavati's death, he had also lost his usual zest but this had recently begun to revive. It is inevitable that J.P. should have wondered what would have happened in case things went wrong in Vellore. He was to be far away from Patna for five weeks and he wanted to make sure that the campaign was kept going in a peaceful and disciplined manner. He therefore named four of his faithful and trusted colleagues to guide things in his absence. These were Acharya Ramamurti, Narayan Desai, Manmohan Choudhary and Tripurari Sharan. J.P. also announced a programme of activities for the five weeks of his absence.

The Operation

Jayaprakash's operation was to take place on 29 April at the Christian Medical College Hospital at Vellore, which has some of the best surgeons in India. Feeling that J.P., since Prabhavati's death, was in a way all alone, I reached Vellore on 28 April to be with him through his ordeal and found him cheerful and composed.

The following morning he was transported smiling to the operation theatre, while the rest of us, including the Governor of U.P., Akbar Ali Khan, who had come all the way from Lucknow, Professor Sujata Das Gupta, Director of the Gandhian Institute of Studies, and many others, waited. We were told that the operation

was a success but Jayaprakash was not brought back to his room and was kept in the operating theatre for several hours after the operation. Those were anxious hours and we were later told that Jayaprakash's heart had given cause for anxiety. By tea-time however he was back in his room looking none the worse for the ordeal. Yet, once again, in the middle of the night there was another crisis. Throughout the night a team of seven specialists kept vigil at his bedside and refused to move till the crisis was over early in the morning. It was touching to see the devotion with which he was treated. Jayaprakash's recovery was slow, but the care of his medical advisers and his own will combined to see him through.

By the end of May J.P.'s wound had not yet healed completely, but he began agitating to get back to Patna where he had promised to address a public meeting on 5 June. I flew down to Madras to meet him on his way back to Bihar and, when I found that his wound was still suppurating, I reproached him for not having listened to his doctors and for taking these risks. In his speech on 5 June, Jayaprakash referred to this matter:

The doctors were reluctant to release me from the hospital. They asked me: 'Jayaprakashji, would it cause great distress to you if you did not reach Patna on the 5th June?' I replied: 'I would be most distressed. This entire programme is based on my being there.' Then they allowed me to go; for the mind always dominates the body.

In Madras, before he left for Calcutta on his way to Patna, Jayaprakash told me he would like to visit Bombay shortly so that we could all sit together and plan the further development of the Bihar agitation and its national overflow. I told him that, much as I would love to see him in Bombay and exchange ideas with him, I thought this kind of collective planning was not on. He had now reached a stage where his own instinct and what Gandhiji used to call his 'inner voice' should guide him to take the successive steps in the development of the movement. Indeed, I went so far as to urge that he should not leave Bihar, but should concentrate on the local situation in the same spirit in which Gandhiji had developed such local campaigns as the Champaran indigo planters' agitation and the Bardoli no-tax campaign. I argued that the ripple effect of his success in Bihar would be more effective than anything he

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himself could do in other States of India where the spark that existed in Bihar was not to be found.

When Jayaprakash was back in Patna I wrote to him reminding him of his doctors' advice and suggested that his physical survival was a national asset which even he personally had no right to dissipate. Appealing to his sense of humour, since I knew that his sense of personal survival would not be very strong, I wrote and told him a story about the cleric Abbé Sieyés, who was a notable participant in the French Revolution. After the Revolution was over and France had settled down to normalcy, somebody went to see the old cleric and asked: 'And what, Abbé, did you do during the Revolution?' The Abbé's sardonic reply was: 'I survived.' I urged that Jayaprakash could do worse than copy the wise Abbé's feat.

6 *Fanning Out*

Jayaprakash's return from Vellore to Patna in the beginning of June had his adversaries, particularly the C.P.I., worried. The C.P.I. decided to hold anti-J.P. and pro-government demonstrations in Patna even before Jayaprakash addressed a mass rally there on 5 June. Only two days before Jayaprakash's 5 June rally, the C.P.I. staged a demonstration in front of the State Assembly in Patna. About 50,000 people participated. The C.P.I. leader, S.A. Dange, and others had specially arrived in Patna to address the rally. They were given a red carpet welcome by the State administration, a pattern of partisanship which has often been repeated since, as the C.P.I. have been acting as the ruling party's 'storm troopers'. According to *The Hindustan Times* report there were men in the C.P.I. *morcha* who were armed with bows and arrows. The correspondent also reported that 'later in the evening, the Commissioner of the Patna Division, P.S. Kohli, told newsmen that action against the Communist processionists who carried weapons in violation of the prohibitory order was under consideration'. There are no subsequent reports, however, to show that any such action was taken. The correspondent continued:

Mr. Kohli said nothing untoward happened before or after the C.P.I. rally in which about 50,000 to 55,000 party workers and supporters participated. According to him three main factors 'helped us to maintain peace: today's exemplary restraint on the part of those demanding the dissolution of the Assembly, faithful honouring of the commitment by the C.P.I. and the intensive deployment of about forty-five companies of security forces including the Border Security Force, the Central Reserve Police and the Rajasthan Constabulary.' The massive security arrangements were made apparently to meet Jayaprakash's rally two days later.

This became evident on 5 June. *The Indian Express* reported:

The police behaviour today was positively abrasive. Policemen brusquely shooed away people thronging the pavements. One of the police officials pathetically admitted that anything unpleasant noticed in their behaviour was not voluntary. According to Sarvodaya sources, at many railway stations magistrates and policemen drove away ticket-holders who looked like possible participants in the procession. Steamers of the North Eastern Railway and a private firm were sailing two hours late between the banks of the Ganges. Buses coming into Patna remained cancelled. Even at Patna Junction station there were hoards of BSF and CRP personnel checking people.

The press reports of the 5 June rally in Patna captured some of the spirit of the gigantic mass demonstration. *The Times of India* reported:

‘Nearly half-a-million people today marched to Raj Bhavan under the leadership of Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan to present to the Governor, Mr. R.D. Bhandare, two million signatures in support of the demand for the dissolution of the Bihar Vidhan Sabha.

‘Presenting the signatures received by the Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti and State Sarvodaya Mandal headquarters till 3 p.m., Mr. Narayan told the Governor that ‘no democratic government in the world could have behaved like this in obstructing and sabotaging a people’s movement’.

‘In lighter vein, Mr. Bhandare remarked: “Is it so? But may be that is because you are regarded as an anti-democrat?”

‘Mr. Narayan smiled and replied: “That may be their definition.” The Governor: “But can we demand the dissolution of the Assemblies through mass demonstrations?”

‘Mr. Narayan: “When there is no provision for the recall of legislators in our Constitution, what can the masses do?”

‘The truck which carried the stacks of signatures and thumb impressions of the many illiterate or semi-literate people of the interior areas was allowed to enter the Raj Bhavan premises with Mr. Narayan’s jeep. The bundles were wrapped in red cloth and guarded by women volunteers and student leaders.

‘The preamble to the Memorandum, submitted with each signature, asserted that the Government had failed to rise above narrow partisan interests and with its brute majority in the Vidhan

Sabha and with police and military power had sought to crush the popular student movement when it had peacefully raised the issues of corruption, the price rise and unemployment.'

Even as the half-million strong procession was returning from Raj Bhavan after submitting the people's memorandum to the Governor, there was an ugly incident. Eight rounds were fired at the procession from a government flat occupied by an organisation called the Indira Brigade. Twelve people were injured according to *The Times of India* whereas *The Indian Express* gives the number as twenty-one. Six people were arrested from the flat. A smoking shotgun and ten live cartridges were recovered from them. It was reported later that the shots were fired from the flat of a Congress M.L.A., Phulena Rai, who had gone underground. One live bomb and a half-exploded one were recovered from near the flat.

The District Magistrate of Patna, V.S. Dube, commended the processionists for showing restraint despite the firing. This showed that Jayaprakash's discipline had influenced the hundreds of thousands of people following him. It also underlined the fact that even Jayaprakash's own life was no longer safe from possible attacks by the more unscrupulous, fanatical and cowardly among his political adversaries.

Jayaprakash's speech on 5 June is a stirring address and has the overtones of being delivered by someone like a prophet. Jayaprakash is not a well organised public speaker and it is because of this reason among others that he is such a long-winded one, but he has that rare empathy which makes him a charismatic leader who can project himself into the minds of his audience and move them.

Early in his two hour speech in Hidustani, Jayaprakash himself referred to the way in which he delivered his speeches:

Till this day, I have never delivered speeches based on prepared notes. When I rise to speak, I speak out what rises within me. Sometimes it clicks, sometimes it doesn't. But on this occasion I have to shoulder a great responsibility, a responsibility I have hardly asked for. . . . When the students persuaded me to lead them and not merely to guide them, I hedged. . . . But now I must tell you that I am not merely lending my name to you as a leader of your movement. I would relinquish the leadership of this movement the instant I feel that I am a mere puppet whose actions and

speeches are prompted by those who remain behind the scenes. I shall listen to all of you. I shall try to understand every point you make. But the decision will be mine. All of you must abide by my decision. Only then would this leadership make some sense, only then would this revolution succeed. . . .

This was a new Jayaprakash, a firm leader. Despite gentle tuggings on the part of his anxious doctors and friends on the platform, his speech was almost encyclopaedic—partly autobiographical and partly analytical. He explained his own political evolution and took pains to deal with the provocations which had led him to launch his campaign. He said:

We have to go far, very far. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, the people have to travel many long miles to achieve that freedom for which thousands of the country's youth made sacrifices, for which Sardar Bhagat Singh and his comrades, revolutionaries of Bengal, of Maharashtra, of the whole country were shot dead or were hanged to death.

Millions of our countrymen filled the jails again and again to attain freedom, but after twenty-seven years of that freedom, the people are groaning. Hunger, soaring prices and corruption stalk everywhere. The people are being crushed under all sorts of injustice.

Educational institutions are corrupted. Thousands of youth face a bleak future. Unemployment goes on increasing. The poor get less and less work. Land ceiling laws are passed, but the number of landless people is increasing. Small farmers have lost their lands.

Now a friend, a Congress M.P., says I should suspend the movement for two months, pending talks with Dikshitji. I was amazed at the suggestion. What sort of fool does he think I am? He has not understood this movement at all. Does he think it has come out of my pocket, that I can start or withdraw it whenever I like? They should have started talks with me on the day I declared that the problem of corruption had become intolerable and come out openly to wage a fight against it.

Going on to explain that the protest on which he had launched was not a personal quarrel with any one but emerged almost

inevitably from the state of the nation and from his own past commitments through the years, Jayaprakash said:

'I used to have my differences even with Bapu. And Bapu had the greatness to listen patiently to all criticism. He would affectionately call us over for a discussion in which he persuaded us to accept his point of view. Well, then, I have even dared to criticise Bapu himself. In those days I was a thorough Marxist. Later, I became a Democratic Socialist. It was only several years after Bapu's death in 1954 that I joined the Sarvodaya movement.

'Then there was Jawaharlal, almost my elder brother. In fact I used to address him as 'Bhai'. He had great affection for me. I too had great love and respect for him. But this hardly ever prevented me from bitterly criticising him whenever I differed with him. But he too had the largeness of heart to accept criticism....

'I had also criticised Lal Bahadur's Kashmir policy....Now the differences I have with Indiraji are somewhat more serious and fundamental than the differences I had with Jawaharlal. My differences with Jawaharlal were about his foreign policy....we had very few differences about his domestic policy. I disagreed with him over Tibet, over China and over Hungary. And, believe me, I am not boasting; Jawaharlal had to accept later whatever I said about Hungary. He disagreed with me over Tibet and yet, when China betrayed him, the blow was so severe that it proved fatal. He died within two years of receiving it. He had never expected China to invade India....However, my differences with Indiraji are about domestic policy itself....

'I have no personal quarrel whether with Indiraji or anyone else. My quarrels are in the nature of ideological differences, dissenting opinion, opposition of policies. I do not quarrel: I dissent....

'Yesterday, a friend came to see me. He wants to restore understanding between Indiraji and myself. I have often explained to people that though there is not much of a difference between Indiraji's age and mine, my late wife, Prabhavati, and I have always regarded her as if she were our own daughter because she is the daughter of Jawaharlal. I have seen her since childhood. I have great affection for her. What personal quarrel can I have with her? And yet, when she made that speech in Bhubaneswar, she did not refer to any political differences between us, though there are many.

'I have given her whatever assistance she has asked me to give regardless of our political differences and she knows it. On 15 February,

after my return from Ahmedabad, I had a talk with her. She requested me to persuade the opposition parties to cooperate with her. I was ill. But, as soon as I recovered a little, I invited Atal Behari Vajpayee. . . . Later I also talked to the Socialists. . . . wrote a letter to Indiraji informing her about the response to my efforts of the opposition parties. . . .

‘Despite our serious political differences I have done this for her. And yet, in Bhubaneswar, she said that a man who accepts money from the rich has no moral right to denounce corruption. No, she did not name me. But, as soon as she returned to Delhi, she told M.P.s. from Bihar that a man who lives in the posh guest house of the wealthy and travels at their expense has no moral right to denounce corruption. Now, I admit that I cannot be compared to even a speck of dust touched by Gandhiji’s feet, but has she forgotten Gandhiji too? When he visited Delhi, where did he stay? Sometimes in the Bhangi colony, and sometimes at Birla House. Now can anybody ever have the temerity to say that Birla had bought over Gandhiji?’

Controversy with Vinobaji

A critical moment for Jayaprakash arrived, not in the shape of political opposition but in the form of Acharya Vinoba Bhave’s reported disapproval of his movement. It was feared that there would be a crisis among *sarvodayis* themselves on this issue.

The Jayaprakash-Vinoba confrontation took place in June 1974. A Congress M.P. made a statement to the press on 7 June saying that Acharya Vinoba Bhave had told him that he regarded the agitation for the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly as a ‘mistaken step’.

Jayaprakash’s reaction to Vinoba’s reported disapproval of the ‘dissolve the Assembly campaign’ in Bihar was characteristic of him. According to press reports of 2 June, he had drafted a statement which he would release after it had been shown to the Acharya in Wardha. A report published in *The Statesman* of 13 June quotes Jayaprakash:

It was after the police firing in Gaya ‘which was the centre of my political and *sarvodaya* activities for the past thirty-five years’ that his mind was made up that the Bihar Assembly, ‘upholding corrup-

tion, inefficiency and misdeeds of the Government, must go'. Mr. Narayan has expressed bitterness that on learning of the incident in which some shots were fired at the procession led by him, Acharya Vinoba Bhave is reported to have remarked: 'Whatever is happening in Patna, I leave to God for his verdict.' Mr. Narayan has said: 'When Vinobaji is passing the responsibility to God in a matter of such a patently criminal and dastardly act, I wish he had left to God other matters too connected with the movement such as the resignation of the Bihar Ministry or dissolution of the Assembly.'

There was much speculation about the differences between Jayaprakash and Vinobaji and what it might mean for the Sarvodaya movement itself. It was only in the second week of July that Jayaprakash could meet Vinobaji at Paunar. Reports dated 10 July from Paunar in *The Statesman* and *The Times of India* stated that the differences between the two Sarvodaya leaders had considerably narrowed.

The Sarva Seva Sangh meeting to discuss Jayaprakash's campaign was stormy, at least by Sarvodaya standards. It was reported that senior leaders of the Sarvodaya movement, including Siddharaj Dhadha, President of the Sarva Seva Sangh, Professor Thakurdas Bang, the Sangh's Secretary, and Acharya Dada Dharmadhikari, wanted Sarvodaya workers to take 'a headlong plunge and support Mr. Narayan with all their might'.

The Times of India also reported that those opposing the movement in Bihar contended that, as Acharya Vinoba Bhave had a soft corner for the Prime Minister, the Sangh should not do anything to weaken her position.

Reports from Wardha dated 11 July spoke of bitter debate among *sarvodayis*. The executive of the Sarva Seva Sangh had been discussing the Bihar movement since Sunday, 7 July. The Sarva Seva Sangh President, Siddharaj Dhadha, submitted his resignation that night and with his resignation the twenty-four member Working Committee of the Sarva Seva Sangh stood dissolved. Of the seventeen units of the Sangh as many as fifteen supported the agitation.

Of the eighteen members present at the 11 July meeting, thirteen supported the resolution, and five, who were known to be close associates of Acharya Vinoba Bhave, opposed it. For the first

time since the meeting began, the existence of differences between Vinoba and Jayaprakash over the Bihar issue was publicly mentioned by Dada Dharmadhikari, who also reminded the delegates that no resolution could be passed if it was opposed even by a single member.

Eventually, the controversy was settled in favour of Jayaprakash's campaign in Bihar. Acharya Vinoba Bhave, according to *The Times of India*, resolved the crisis that threatened to split the Sarvodaya movement by giving the green signal to its workers to participate in Jayaprakash's agitation in Bihar. On this, the President of the Sarva Seva Sangh and fourteen other Working Committee members who wanted to join Jayaprakash's movement and who had therefore resigned earlier withdrew their resignations. The Acharya said about those who wanted to participate in the Bihar movement: 'If they succeed, it is good. If they fail, they will learn a lesson.'

For Jayaprakash this was not only a triumph but also a relief. This, however, was not to be the end of the story.

In Bihar

Meanwhile, Bihar continued to boil. From the middle of June there had been a daily *satyagraha* in front of the State Legislative Assembly gates and, by 1 July, no less than 1600 picketeers had been arrested at the Assembly gates in Patna. From the rest of Bihar, reports continued to pour in of students boycotting colleges and universities. On 13 July, there was a massive student demonstration in front of Raj Bhavan demanding the closure of all colleges and universities in the State for a year. Two days later, thousands of students all over Bihar, except in Ranchi, boycotted their colleges which reopened after a lapse of about four months. Processions and demonstrations were organised in all university towns including Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Gaya and Ranchi. By then the total number of arrests in the State mounted to 1800, including some sixty-five student leaders arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA).

J.P. took things a step forward when, on 1 August, he announced the launching of a statewide 'no-tax-cum-gherao' campaign in Patna. This move in a way signalled the shifting of the campaign for the removal of the Ghafoor Ministry and the dissolution of the State Assembly from the urban areas to the rural areas.

Bihar celebrated Independence Day, 15 August, in an unusual mood. The Chief Minister, Abdul Ghafoor, took the salute at the official parade which was less colourful and thinly attended than in previous years. On the other hand, a larger number of people attended the People's Independence Day, organised by the students and volunteers of the Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti. This rally, held at the Adalatganj playground, had an unusual feature in that the national flag was unfurled by a rickshaw-puller who had recently been imprisoned in connection with the students' movement. The occasion was marred by a mild lathi charge in which half a dozen persons, including two journalists, were injured. Lathi charges also marred similar celebrations elsewhere in the State.

Police intolerance was mounting and Jayaprakash, along with several political leaders and Sarvodaya workers, housewives and students, undertook a twelve-hour fast in observance of anti-repression day in Bihar in protest against what Jayaprakash described as 'indiscriminate arrests, lathi-charges on peaceful demonstrators and the beating up of students and detenues in jail'.

Three-day Bandh

The three-day *bandh*, on 3, 4 and 5 October, called by Jayaprakash in Bihar in protest against the repressive policies of the State Government, was, except in Chhota Nagpur, a fantastic success and exceeded the wildest dreams of its sponsors. The people had shown that they were solidly behind him despite Government controlled media working overtime. Addressing a mammoth public meeting on 6 October at Patna, which was attended, according to *The Times of India*, by five lakhs of people, Jayaprakash declared that the *bandh* had signalled the end of the 'Indira Wave' in Bihar. Neither she nor the Chief Minister should have any doubt about the verdict of the people. He appealed to Members of the State Assembly to read the writing on the wall and resign in good time. Answering questions why the Government had not arrested him, Jayaprakash said at a rally in Patna on 6 October that the Government knew it would not be possible to handle the situation in Bihar if he were arrested.

Jayaprakash then proceeded to spell out the implications of the successful *bandh*:

'Whatever the Chief Minister of Bihar might think, the truth

is that traders did not close their shops out of fear...there was no element of coercion, no stone-throwing, nothing to create a sense of fear. And it was not merely for a day. For three days and three nights the strike continued all over Bihar....Such a thing never happened even during the freedom struggle.

'The whole thing was possible only with the support of the Chhatra Sangharsha Samiti and the Coordination Committee of political parties. Students including school boys in towns and villages were in the forefront and were backed by their elders....

'All India Radio has been highlighting only the incidents of stray violence. But considering the great dimensions of the movement, what is the significance of a few incidents of violence?... Even with regard to the incidents of violence that have taken place, I doubt if students or men and women *satyagrahis* were responsible for them....*Satyagrahis* have shown great courage in peaceful action. At Karmanasha, as a train was halted by squatters, a seventy-two year old woman went up to the engine and said to the driver that he was like a son to her but he could take the train further only by crushing her under the wheels. Then the police came, beat up the *satyagrahis* and arrested the woman to clear the track.

'Incidents of tampering with tracks or signals or setting fire to cabins are minimal....Train services in Bihar were paralysed during the strike mainly by hundreds, even thousands of men, women and children squatting on the tracks at hundreds of places....

'On the night of 4 October, I received inside information that the Bihar Ministry was exasperated with the success of the peaceful strike in Patna. So a conspiracy was hatched that peace in Patna should somehow be disturbed to defame the movement.'

According to *Everyman's*, thirteen lives were lost and at least twice as many injured. To meet the *bandh*, the Bihar Government had deployed 5,000 Border Security Force; 10,000 Central Reserve Police; 13 battalions of the Bihar Military Police; 42,000 regular Bihar Police; 2,500 Railway Protection Force and 80,000 Home Guards.

At the 6 October rally, Jayaprakash had given advance intimation of the next mass activity. Six days later, he announced the date which was to be 4 November. Jayaprakash took the movement one step further in what might be described as calculated escalation.

J.P.'s next rally in Patna was held on Thursday, 10 October, and he announced that if the present Assembly was not dissolved by the deadline set for it, he would organise a 'People's Assembly', based on elections in all the 318 constituencies in Bihar.

In a statement, Jayaprakash respectfully warned the Prime Minister 'not to play with fire':

Every hour that is passing since the morning of the 5th October last brings new evidence of the inside story that had been communicated to me on the night of 4th October that the Bihar Ministry, with the help of pliant officers and their stooges, the right Communist Party, had decided to engineer a violent situation in order to give a bad name to the peaceful movement of Bihar, as also to create an excuse to crush it by armed power. Further evidence of this has come only this evening. I have been prevented from going to Patna city to address a public meeting there.

A press correspondent reported Jayaprakash as saying: 'I want to demonstrate to the whole world what the people of Bihar want. I exhort you to come in lakhs to Patna on a specified day to be announced later to *gherao* the residences of the Ministers and members of the Assembly who have not resigned. You should carry your own *choora* and *sattu* (flattened rice and powdered gram). Your slogan should be "Ministers and MLAs quit. You have ceased to be our representatives." The streets of Patna should ring with this slogan.'

'The people have given their verdict. At least 95 per cent of the people of Bihar have unmistakably demanded that the present Ministry and Assembly in the State must go. If the Prime Minister refuses to see the reality, I say it with full responsibility that she should quit her post, she is unfit to be the Prime Minister of a great country', thundered Jayaprakash at the mass rally on 10 October.

Jayaprakash spelt out in a statement put out on 14 October a four-point plan for the formation of a 'people's government' at the village, panchayat and block levels in Bihar:

- (1) The convening of a People's Assembly if the Vidhan Sabha is not dissolved and the Ghafoor Ministry dismissed;
- (2) The *gherao* of the Secretariat which would begin at noon

on 4 November and end on the morning of 5 November;

- (3) A programme to paralyse government activity throughout the State; and
- (4) A no-tax campaign.

The legislators who had already resigned their Assembly seats would represent their respective constituencies in the People's Assembly. In the remaining constituencies, two representatives each from the panchayat, Chhatra and Jana Sangharsh Samitis would constitute a constituency council to elect the representatives. All the adults in a village would constitute the *gram sabha* and village representatives would constitute the panchayat *jana sabha*. One elected representative or *mukhia* from each panchayat would constitute the block *jana sabha*. The *gram sabha* and the *jana sabha* would elect *sanchalaks* to be responsible for different types of work.

Jayaprakash also announced that no tax should be paid to the government. In the first phase, the main task of the people's administration would be the boycott of police stations and the organisation of *gram shanti dals*.

Youth would be given prominence at every level and adequate representation given to women, Harijans, Muslims, Adivasis and the poor. The people's administration would function with the help of voluntary contributions. Courts and government offices and departments directly concerned with the people's welfare would be allowed to function.

Counter-Offensive

The Government's communist allies, both within the Congress Party and outside, were not lying low during this period. In the middle of July, fifteen fellow travelling Congress Members of Parliament issued a joint statement accusing Jayaprakash of spreading disunity and discord in the country. They described Jayaprakash 'as the active agent of a fascist take-over in India'.

On 16 October, a joint meeting of the Bihar Cabinet and top leaders of the State C.P.I. decided to adopt a 'tough line' towards Jayaprakash and the movement led by him. It was decided that the Congress and the C.P.I. would hold separate demonstrations against the agitators' demand for the dissolution of the Assembly.

And at its meeting in New Delhi on 18 October, the Congress Working Committee decided, according to a report of 20 October, to launch a counter-offensive and fight it out.

The Congress Working Committee was reported to have labelled the Bihar movement as 'fascist' and a challenge to parliamentary democracy which left the Congress Party and the Government with no other alternative but to oppose it with all possible democratic means. The dissolution of the State Assembly or its suspension was ruled out. The counter-offensive would take the form of rallies, demonstrations and meetings to educate the people about the threat that was being posed to the survival of democracy.

The Working Committee, however, was by no means unanimous in its opting for a confrontation. There was a clear voice of protest from within its own ranks. Press reports of what happened at the meeting of the Congress Working Committee on 18 October mentioned a clash between K. Chandrasekhar, one of the 'young Turks' of the Congress Party, on the one hand, and the crypto-Communists like D. P. Dhar, P. Das Munshi and Vayalar Ravi on the other. It was reported that Chandrasekhar flared up when he was criticised for saying on an earlier occasion that it was not fair to dub Jayaprakash as anti-national or a C.I.A. agent. He disagreed with his critics when they alleged that the purpose of the movement was to oust Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress from power. He said that Jayaprakash had often told him that this was not his intention—'I believe what he tells me, regardless of what the newspapers may write.' Nonetheless, the lines of battle were clearly drawn. The meeting of the Congress Working Committee issued what might be described as 'a declaration of war' which the Congress Party would fight alongside of the Communist Party.

It was left to the so-called 'Left' wing of the Congress Party to fire the first shots in the counter-offensive. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi announced that the Indian Youth Congress had given a call to observe 5 to 12 November as the 'Save Democracy Week', while the Communist Party announced plans for a country-wide campaign beginning with a rally on 2 November which would be observed as 'defeat rightist plot day'. The Communist leaders, C. Rajeshwara Rao and Jogendra Sharma, viewed the movement 'as part of a conspiracy of the forces of right reaction to exploit the legitimate discontent and anger of the people against the present regime for building up reaction's offensive to seize power'. They even took credit for the

movement not having succeeded so far, maintaining that this was due to C.P.I. opposition.

The Congress-C.P.I. axis was given a formal blessing by the Congress President, D.K. Barooah, when he wrote in the third week of October to the Presidents of the Provincial Congress Committees and members of the State Legislatures permitting the Party's State units to work together with the Communist Party to fight the Bihar movement. The delicate way in which he put it was: 'We should be ready to work together with other democratic and progressive forces and parties who share a common commitment to the defence of democracy and parliamentary institutions.' That was Barooah's way of describing a party which by definition is committed to the overthrow of democracy and has done so wherever it has had the chance in any part of the world.

In the last week of October, the Bihar Government took administrative measures to back up its propaganda offensive. The repression in the State continued. Karpuri Thakur of the S.S.P., Ramanand Tiwari of the S.P., and Kailashpati Mishra of the Jan Sangh were detained under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act. Then came the externment from the State for a period of sixty days of Jayaprakash's close associates like Acharya Ramamurtu, Thakurdas Bang and Sarla Bhaduria. There were a dozen others also served with externment orders once they could be located, including S.M. Joshi and Radhakrishna of the Gandhi Peace Foundation. These steps were described by Jayaprakash as the desperate act of a Government that had lost all moral sanctions. At the same time he said he felt 'as if his right arm had been sheared off'.

The Congress President, D.K. Barooah, visited Patna on 28 October. His visit started inauspiciously, since a young boy was run over either by one of the cars in the motorcade or his own car. The Congress President claimed that his mission in Patna was to unite all Congressmen so that the Party could meet effectively the united bid of the anti-Congress forces to 'upset the system of parliamentary democracy'. At a meeting of the Congress workers, he was asked by one of those present: 'For whom are we to shed blood?' From these quarters came the demand: 'First oust the present leader (Mr. Ghaffoor).' Barooah was angry and said that the choice before Congressmen was either to surrender to Jayaprakash or resolutely to face the challenge. The Congress Working Committee had made the choice. Those who disagreed with this decision 'are not our friends'.

Jayaprakash revealed to pressmen on 20 October that he had information from reliable sources that the Bihar Government would resort to heavy barricading in Patna to foil the demonstration of 4 November. As on previous occasions, buses might be taken off the roads and steamer and train services on certain sections might also be suspended. He regretted this, as most people would come to Patna unarmed except for some farmers who carried sticks as a matter of habit. He emphasised that in no case would they carry lethal weapons 'as is often done by C.P.I. demonstrators with the connivance of the Government'. The demand to throw out the corrupt, inefficient and arbitrary Congress rule, lock, stock and barrel, was purely a people's demand, whatever might be the stand of the Prime Minister. 'In the given circumstances Mahatma Gandhi would have agreed with the people's demand for immediate ouster of the Congress Government for its continued misrule and acts of omission and commission.'

Jayaprakash declared that it was the fundamental right of the people to govern themselves and to refuse to recognise a government which no longer enjoyed their suffrage and had turned usurper and imposter. 'This may be open rebellion in the eyes of Indiraji and her worthy colleagues, but it is pure and simple people's democracy' declared Jayaprakash.

Turning to Bihar's M.P.s, Jayaprakash said: 'Let me remind the Bihar M.P.s with due respect that, while they owe a certain loyalty to their leaders, as people's representatives their loyalty to the people must take precedence over the party. Let them remember that even if there is no snap parliamentary election next year, as persistently rumoured, it is less than a year and a half for the scheduled elections to take place.'

Touring Other States

During this period, the agitation in Bihar began to attract in a big way people in other parts of the country, particularly in the North. Jayaprakash decided not to neglect this support and, despite the strain on his health, undertook a fair amount of touring in the rest of India. Travelling to Allahabad to address on 22 and 23 June an All-India Youth Conference, he appealed to the youth of India to dedicate a year of their life to work for peaceful change, and compared the Bihar movement with Sardar Patel's famous Bardoli agitation. He also referred to Gandhiji's Dandi March and explained

how, from what appeared to be a modest beginning, these incidents developed swiftly into a national mass movement.

Towards the end of his address, Jayaprakash said:

The problems being faced by the people are not confined to Bihar alone, but are present as much in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere. The fire is there and the heat is increasing. It is not possible for any party to build up a movement. Circumstances will give birth to people's movements and they will be led by students and youth. It may take some time. But if one lakh students, young men and women come out and dedicate their lives to the people's struggle, a revolution will be born.

Then followed a tour that took him to Calcutta, Nagpur and Bombay.

Jayaprakash paid another visit to Uttar Pradesh during the last week of August. On 25 August, he addressed a conference of students in Lucknow. He warned them that they would have to stand on their own legs and not depend on him. Any decision to launch a campaign similar to that in Bihar should be taken by them. He could only offer advice. He had not come to Lucknow to set the State on fire. He was too busy with the Bihar movement to find time for initiating or leading struggles in other States. His first loyalty was to the movement in Bihar which was like the *satyagraha* in Bardoli. If the struggle in Bihar was successful, a revolution would sweep the country since the problems were more or less the same.

An unusual feature of Jayaprakash's visit to Lucknow was that Akbar Ali Khan, the Governor of U.P., a staunch Congressman but also a good friend of Jayaprakash, invited Jayaprakash and the Chief Minister, H.N. Bahuguna, to lunch together at the Raj Bhavan. The meeting was cordial. At the same time, the Chief Minister was confident that there would be no similar agitation in Uttar Pradesh and added: 'Bihar is a long way off.'

Later in the day, Jayaprakash addressed a lakh of people in the Hazarat Mahal Park. He made a cryptic but significant remark when he said: 'Remember, I am asking you only to stage a demonstration and not ask for the dissolution of the Assembly. The suggestion for the dissolution comes from you, not from me.'

Speaking in Calcutta on 30 September, Jayaprakash replied to the Prime Minister's charge that he was weakening democracy.

He explained that on the contrary *Loktantra* had moved away from the *Lok* and only the *Tantra* had remained. All democratic institutions were on the verge of a breakdown; all democratic conventions were being abandoned. The judiciary had been robbed of its independence. The balance between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary had been destroyed. Too much power was being vested in the executive. In Bihar, the State Government had promulgated 176 Ordinances. The elections had lost their meaning because of free flow of black money and strong-arm tactics.

In Uttar Pradesh, Jayaprakash was facing difficulties. The Uttar Pradesh Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Samiti's Steering Committee accused opposition political parties in Uttar Pradesh of sabotaging the people's movement in that State and of using the name of Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan for their own political ends. Talking to reporters, two of their leaderss aid: 'We want the entire system changed, we do not want the ruling Congress Party to be simply replaced by the Jan Sangh or the BLD.'

In the Punjab too there were problems where Sarvodaya workers began to resist association with political parties. A Punjab Sarvodaya worker and Secretary of the Gandhi Peace Foundation in the State urged Jayaprakash to visit the Punjab only when invited by the Sarvodaya workers or a non-political organisation as he feared that political parties only sought to exploit Mr. Narayan's name for their own ends.

On 31 October, Jayaprakash was in Delhi on his way from Rajasthan to Ludhiana. Addressing a luncheon meeting of the Press Club, he said it would be wrong to conclude that the Bihar movement, if intensified, would necessarily lead to a civil war or military involvement. He claimed that a total revolution and a peaceful revolution were quite compatible. 'There is no question of the armed forces being involved in the situation except for their sympathy being transferred from the usurper Government to those who truly represent the people.'

Jayaprakash also denied that he had refused to have talks with the Prime Minister or her emissaries. At the Press Club luncheon, Jayaprakash revealed that he had been told by N.G. Goray that Uma Shankar Dikshit had told him that the Gujarat agitation had succeeded because Jayaprakash was not there. Jayaprakash said that 'if that was so, he would be quite prepared to withdraw from the scene'.

When Jayaprakash arrived in Ludhiana, he was met by a fantastically large gathering. What was significant was that despite the meeting being in the thick of the rabi sowing period and the continuous supply of water and power offered by the authorities, a large number of farmers were present at the meeting.

When Jayaprakash broke journey in Delhi on 31 October on his way back to Patna from Ludhiana he was visited by a good friend who told him that the Prime Minister would like to meet him that evening. Jayaprakash said that he was too tired to move out again that evening but would be glad to call on her the following morning. Jayaprakash was a little intrigued at this invitation and the person through whom it was received because earlier one or two others had met him in Patna and Delhi on behalf of the Prime Minister to find out if there was any basis for an agreement and a meeting between Jayaprakash and Mrs. Gandhi. As a result of the discussion these two persons had with Jayaprakash, they wrote down what they understood to be his position. Jayaprakash saw the points and okayed them but he also made it clear that it was not to be understood as a commitment on his part at this stage, but as something which could be the basis of an agreement between him and the Prime Minister. As reported in the press the nine points in the formula were:

- the resignation of the Bihar Ministry;
- the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly or its indefinite suspension till the next elections to the State Assembly;
- imposition of President's rule in Bihar;
- an invitation from the Governor to him and his friends for talks to end the confrontation;
- the release of political prisoners;
- inviting Jayaprakash to give concrete suggestions to end corruption;
- the constitution of a committee for educational reforms;
- electoral reform;
- Jayaprakash's continued guidance to the people's movement in other States based on their genuine needs and difficulties without his extending his support to those who merely asked for the dissolution of the State Assemblies.

This formula had been conveyed by the two persons to the Prime Minister and Jayaprakash was a little bewildered as to why

the invitation should have come not through them but through a third party. He immediately sent for them and asked them if they knew anything about it. They said they did not but that they would be happy if he responded to the Prime Minister's invitation, which he did the following morning.

Jayaprakash was a little taken aback when, soon after greetings were exchanged, the Prime Minister asked him what he had to say. Jayaprakash pointed out that it was she who had sent for him and he had nothing to say beyond what had already been given to her on paper and that the ball was therefore in her court. The Prime Minister on her part referred to the complaint that Jayaprakash had made in public that she had not taken seriously the suggestions that he had made earlier in 1973 regarding the rooting out of corruption, particularly political corruption, including the huge expenditure on elections, for which presumably a great deal of the funds came from the black market. She said she would like to discuss them now. Jayaprakash pointed out that this was perhaps now eight months too late during which a great deal had happened and around a hundred young men in Bihar had sacrificed their lives.

Jayaprakash came away from the ninety minute interview very perplexed as to why the Prime Minister should send for him if she did not intend to respond to the formula. Immediately after his meeting, Jayaprakash told the press:

She expressed her natural anxiety over the Bihar movement and its possible escalation to different States. I explained to her the various issues involved like inflation, electoral reform, corruption—particularly political—educational reconstruction, in addition to the dismissal of the Ghafoor Ministry and the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly. I also drew her attention to the extremely critical situation in the country and impressed upon her the need to take urgent steps to remedy the situation if the confidence of the people in democratic institutions or processes is to be continued.

The Prime Minister on her part addressed a public meeting in Delhi the same evening and declared that she would rather resign than yield to pressure and the demand for the dismissal of Ministries and dissolution of Assemblies. There would be no dissolution, she affirmed, and said that if the people were not satisfied with the present government they could throw it out at the next election. She

conceded that the dissolution of the Gujarat Assembly was a mistake as it had not helped to improve matters. The following day there was a press report that the Union Cabinet had endorsed the stand taken by the Prime Minister during her meeting with Jayaprakash.

My Impressions

As it happened, I spent a day with Jayaprakash from 2 November to 3 November. I was delighted to find him looking much fitter and younger than when he visited Bombay in August. He was also in good fettle and the breakdown of the talks with the Prime Minister appeared to have steeled his determination to see the fight through to the finish. Referring to the Prime Minister's challenge to fight it out at the next elections in Bihar, he told me that neither he nor his boys were in any hurry and they would be quite prepared to wait for the showdown as and when it came.

The spirit and atmosphere of Jayaprakash's home, which had become his camp and his headquarters, reminded me of nothing so much as the way in which the Congress headquarters used to function in the stormy days of civil disobedience and the 'Quit India' campaign. It was obviously the G.H.Q. of a non-violent war with queues of groups and delegations waiting to see him, whether of foreign journalists, women or students. Jayaprakash went through his work quietly and calmly.

I was delighted to find that, from dinner time onwards, J.P. locked himself up in his room upstairs and even more delighted when he asked me to send him some books on English literature. He said that since for the sake of his health and under doctors' orders he had to cut short his activities in the evening and since Prabhavati was no longer there, he felt very lonely and would enjoy nothing so much as reading good English prose, poetry and drama. After I sent him the first batch of books on my return to Bombay, he told me that he was engaged in reading Stephen Spender.

Came 3 November and all eyes and all activity turned towards the momentous day which was to follow. I was fortunate enough, before I left for Calcutta that afternoon for other commitments, to accompany Jayaprakash on his tour around Patna that day. It was felt that, since he had just returned from outside the State, it was important that the people of Patna should know that their leader was once again amongst them. Somehow word of

this decision, which was taken late the previous evening, had leaked out and even as we drove around the town, large numbers of people had collected on the roadside to cheer Jayaprakash, and women strewed flowers on him from the balconies as he passed. There was no doubt that Patna was heading for a major clash the following day. Already the city appeared to be like a besieged place. There were barricades all over, behind which it was obvious the security forces were going to mass to prevent the people from advancing. Jayaprakash was later to mention that those who had suddenly become champions of democracy had given Patna the appearance of a besieged city with barricades all over. 'It appears', he commented, 'that Patna is facing a Chinese invasion.'

The Chief Minister Ghafoor seemed to be living in a fool's paradise when he explained the State Government's action in not arresting Jayaprakash by saying: 'His agitation has fizzled out in any case.' It was obvious to me that Ghafoor was in for a great surprise the following morning.

The impression that I gathered during my brief stay in Patna and my talk with all kinds of people in the city and at the airport was that J.P. had become something of a national hero in Bihar in the same way as Sheikh Abdullah has been in Kashmir. If Jayaprakash had decided to arouse Bihar, he could easily have turned the confrontation into one between Bihar and New Delhi, but being of a different background and a staunch patriot he declined to play on this tremendous sentiment that existed for him among Biharis, whatever their status or background. J.P. is nothing if not a great patriot and throughout his campaign it is noticeable that he has never appealed to local chauvinism as others have done elsewhere in India.

When I was asked by the press before I left Patna for my impressions, I shared them in only a couple of sentences:

I am greatly impressed by the atmosphere in J.P.'s camp which reminds me of the spirit which animated us during the Civil Disobedience and the Quit India campaigns in the days of the struggle for Independence. I have little doubt that, if his health does not let him down, Jayaprakash will succeed in his mission. Time is running in his favour and the forces of history are on his side.

7 *Consolidation*

The story of what happened in Patna on 4 November has already been told. On 5 November, the morning after the battle, Patna was sullen. There was widespread anger over the treatment meted out to the demonstrators and in particular to Jayaprakash. J.P. himself called for a *bandh* to protest against the Government's repressive acts. The Press Trust of India reported that most banks (including the State Bank of India), shops, business houses, and cinema houses were closed. Restaurants and eating houses were closed despite their being exempted. Taxis were scarce and so were city transport buses. The Patna High Court presented a deserted appearance as advocates practising there boycotted it for the day.

Jayaprakash's own comment on the happenings of 4 November pulled no punches. He said: 'Democrats the world over must wonder under which democratic principle a representative government can take away from the people their fundamental rights of movement and expression.' The Congress, J.P. said, had prevented people from coming to Patna on 4 November. Ironically, at election time, 'it will have to go to the same people'.

Why was Jayaprakash not arrested with the 3000 odd *satyagrahis* taken into custody on 4 November? The Commissioner of Police, Patna Division, had an interesting answer: 'Mr. Narayan is not an ordinary person. He is a dignitary of international status. We cannot equate him with an ordinary member of the crowd.'

Communist Demonstration

On 11 November, the Communist Party of India staged its own demonstration in Patna. Again armed with spears, and bows and arrows, the demonstrators, who included farm and factory workers and tribal people drawn from the rural areas, poured into Patna and paraded the streets threatening to wage a bloody struggle against J.P.'s movement.

In marked contrast to the way in which the authorities had sought to crush the popular demonstration of 4 November, the Communist demonstrators were accorded red-carpet treatment by the authorities. According to a press report on 12 November:

For the last three days C.P.I. demonstrators have been coming to Patna. Most of these, according to reliable reports, travelled without tickets on trains. This gave the impression that the Bihar Government tried to encourage the C.P.I. people to come to Patna. All trains and bus services, it will be recalled, had been suspended on 4 November with a view to preventing Jayaprakash's people from coming to Patna.

The Secretary of the Bihar Communist Party, Jagannath Sarkar, on the other hand, alleged that five trains bringing supporters of the C.P.I. were stopped and attacked by alleged followers of Jayaprakash.

The processionists were given printed lists of slogans but several of the slogans raised were not to be found in that list. They were obviously the less discreet ones which were given verbally and these included: '*America ko de do tar, Jayaprakash ke ho gai har*' (send a wire to U.S.A. that Jayaprakash has lost his battle); '*Mang raha hai Hindustan, Lal quila par Lal nishan*' (India is demanding the Red Flag on the Red Fort); '*Jayaprakash ki kya dawai, Joota, chappal aur pitai*' (the medicines needed for Jayaprakash are shoes, chappals and a thrashing); and '*America ki do dalal, Atal Bihari-Jayaprakash*' (Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Jayaprakash are America's two stooges).

Jayaprakash's comment on the blatant discrimination shown by the Bihar Government between the two demonstrations was published in *Everyman's* issue of 16 November:

There is a crucial question involved concerning the rule of law in the country including that of discrimination between two groups of citizens. The entire machinery of the State was deployed on 4 November and the days preceding it forcibly to prevent people of Bihar from coming to their capital city for a peaceful demonstration and dharna.

However, just a week after armed security forces did everything short of killing to prevent a peaceful demonstration, the C.P.I. has not only been given permission to stage a rally in Patna but

official agencies have gone out of their way to provide all possible facilities to help the C.P.I. The people do not want any facilities from the Government, but they have the right to expect not to be obstructed in activities of peaceful assembly and expression.

Congress

On 16 November came the turn of the Congress Party to stage their demonstration. Among those who led the procession were Congress President Barooah, State Chief Minister Abdul Ghafoor, Union Railway Minister L.N. Mishra and Tarakeswari Sinha. Most of the processionists, including women and children, covered the round trip on foot, but a fleet of trucks, jeeps and cars were marshalled for a 'big show of strength'. While the processionists did not shout anti-J.P. slogans, as had been done by the Communists on 11 November, the Congress President declared at a meeting held after the procession that for the present 'a fight and a dialogue will continue side by side'.

Jagjivan Ram who, though present in Patna, had not taken part in the procession, said at a public meeting that evening: 'Jayaprakash is a patriot. Nobody can question that. But what kind of patriotism is it to launch an agitation in a State reeling under the impact of floods and drought?'

While Congress circles claimed that their rally was bigger than the one staged by the C.P.I. on 11 November, their communist allies denied this and claimed that it was the other way around. The crowd at the Congress meeting was estimated at around 35,000.

Jayaprakash's Day

Finally, on 18 November, it was the turn of Jayaprakash and his followers to have their say. By common consent, the meeting addressed by Jayaprakash on that day at the Gandhi Maidan was the largest ever held there and it completely put in the shade the combined attendance of the Communist and Congress parties on the previous occasions. When Jayaprakash reached the platform and saw the huge concourse of people, he was moved to tears at the popular response. His voice choked with sobs, he said it had never been his intention to out-trump his opponents. He felt too overwhelmed to speak for a few minutes at the way in which Patna had

responded to his call and reacted to the attack on him on 4 November.

At this meeting Jayaprakash picked up the gauntlet thrown by Indira Gandhi who had asked Jayaprakash to secure the people's verdict at the next General Elections in Bihar. 'I have accepted the challenge. Neither I nor my boys are in a hurry. We shall wait till the next elections for the people's verdict. Since the Prime Minister has dragged the conflict into the election arena, I shall take my position in the battlefield, not as a candidate, but as a leader. As you have made me the *nayak* of the current agitation', he said, 'I shall also be your *nayak* in the election. In the electoral exercise "forced on us" there would only be two contestants, the people, the students and the Opposition parties with the movement on the one side and "their opponents", namely, the Congress and the C.P.I. on the other.'

Outlining the plans for the movement after 4 November, Jayaprakash said:

'After the great battle some time has to be taken for rest and regrouping of forces. After 4 November, when the people triumphed, we have now to strengthen our organisation, the students' and the people's struggle committees right up to the panchayat level. Any in-fighting for leadership should not be allowed. Funds must be properly accounted for and no bungling should be tolerated.'

'One programme to be taken up is the election of the people's assembly. I have said that we shall give one month's notice to the Government to dissolve the Assembly before starting preparations for electing the people's assembly. But now that the Assembly will not be dissolved, we need not wait.'

'It will be part of the struggle.... The Government may use armed force to prevent the election. The people's assembly may not be able to meet at all.... It won't have funds to dispose of. A law has meaning only if the people accept it. Unlike the present, if the people's assembly adopts a land reform measure the people themselves will implement it. There is a lot that the people's assembly can do without funds. It will be an exercise in political revolution, in political awareness and organisation. Do not take it lightly.'

'There is an old programme of people's government at village, panchayat, block and sub-divisional level which has to be intensified. The people's government should issue orders or make rules and the people should implement it. It can be done only if the struggle committees are strong and well organised. At some places it is

already being done. A people's government functioned for some time in Chand block in Rohtas district. In that area over 1000 have been arrested in Bhabua sub-division alone and are now in jail.

'I am told that a decision on the issue of dissolution of the Assembly or the removal of the Ministry cannot be taken in the streets. Have I ever suggested that the decision should be taken in the streets? Memoranda with millions of signatures of the people were submitted to the Governor on 5 June demanding the Assembly's dissolution. Nothing happened. Hundreds of meetings were held by the electorate in the constituencies and resolutions passed demanding dissolution of the Assembly and sent to the Governor. No action was taken. A democratic Government has to be a responsible government. What kind of a Government is this?'

It was at this meeting that two renowned Hindi literateurs—Phanishwar Nath Renu and Nagarjuna—announced that they were renouncing pensions (Rs. 300 per month) sanctioned for them by the Bihar Government as they were no longer prepared to take any help from a Government which had lost the confidence of the people and was bent upon suppressing and opposing them through brute force. Renu also renounced the 'Padmashri' title that had been conferred on him.

In the midst of all this, Jayaprakash found time to will his eyes after his death to the Eye Bank organised by N. Bakshi, a former member of the Indian Civil Service. Making his offer he said: 'I do not know if an old man's eyes can be of any use, but I have made the offer. I hope my friends and relations will honour my wish.'

The Winter Session of the Bihar Legislative Assembly commenced on 4 December with the arrest of at least a hundred and twenty-five *satyagrahis* for undertaking a *gherao* and *dharna* at the gates of the Assembly. The atmosphere within the chamber was tense with verbal duels between the Government and the Opposition parties. In the Upper House, the Opposition walked out in protest against the refusal of the acting chairman to admit an adjournment motion to censure Government for the lathi blows inflicted by the Central Reserve Police on Jayaprakash on 4 November. On the second day of the Assembly's session, two hundred more *satyagrahis* were arrested for attempted *gherao*. On the third day, another eighty-five *satyagrahis* were arrested by the police.

Meanwhile, there was a shift in the situation on the student front. Students were given the option either to plunge in for total involvement in the campaign for a whole year or to give the movement one day of each week, thus combining studies with agitation. Of the 13,000 students in Patna university, 300 opted for total participation, while 2500 opted for partial participation. This was certainly a setback for the movement.

Jayaprakash, however, was far from discouraged. After a hectic November, December had brought a welcome respite which he used to do some housekeeping, as he explained, to use the lull to build up the infrastructure of the movement. He undertook a reorganisation of the youth and student movement in Bihar. One major decision taken by Jayaprakash was to try and free himself from the hold of Opposition parties by establishing a volunteer force in which only those unconnected with any political party would be enrolled. This would be called the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Bahini (Volunteer force) and, according to Jayaprakash, the target for membership was to be one lakh. A concrete result of this reorganisation was that the Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti (Students Action Committee) was dissolved, the members having submitted their resignations to Jayaprakash as a Yuva Bahini was to be formed with Jayaprakash as its Commandant.

Along with this Jayaprakash made certain changes in the plans being made for elections in Bihar. While insisting that the Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti and the Jana Sangharsh Samiti would jointly select candidates to be set up for contesting elections at the village and panchayat levels, Jayaprakash conceded to the political parties a certain role in the elections to Parliament and State Assemblies. The new picture, as he explained it, was that while all the candidates who stood for the people against the regime would need his sanction and approval, some of them would be nominated by the Samitis while others would be nominated by political parties subject to his approval. Thus all of them would be committed to the cause and at the same time the political parties would be able to have a place in the sun.

Later, Jayaprakash also changed the tactics followed in regard to the daily *dharna* or token *satyagraha* which had been taking place in front of the Bihar Legislative Assembly when it was in session. Jayaprakash announced on 10 February 1975 that this token *satyagraha* would be replaced by massive *dharnas* or *gheraos* organised from time to time so that the student and youth activists would not be

pinned down to Patna all the time but would be able to spend a larger part of the time in the countryside in the work of building up the organs of people's power.

The Tea Party

The furious pace of events between 4 November and 18 November would have taxed the health of even a normally healthy person. But Jayaprakash appeared to be none the worse for wear. On 20 November he was in Delhi. Realising that it was necessary to put a quietus to persistent though not very accurate stories in the press about various formulae to end the Bihar struggle and the efforts of various intermediaries to arrange for him to meet the Prime Minister once again, Jayaprakash issued a statement. Ruling out a settlement on the basis of a short-term suspension of the Bihar Assembly, Jayaprakash disclosed to the press that he thought it necessary to make this clarification so that his well-meaning friends may save their time and his by desisting from wasting it on fanciful compromise formulae. Though not wishing to 'close any doors', Jayaprakash made it clear that he was firm in his demands.

This did not seem to deter the intermediaries. On his arrival in Delhi, Jayaprakash accepted an invitation to meet over a cup of tea, at the home of K. Chandrasekhar, some forty-five Congress Members of Parliament, among whom were some senior office-bearers of the Congress Parliamentary Party. According to press reports, most of those present showed great respect and reverence for Jayaprakash and they spoke of their dilemma arising from their regard for him on the one hand and their loyalty to the Congress on the other. They pleaded with him to find a way out of the impasse. Jayaprakash, on his part, sought their help when he said: 'Help me and help Bihar. You can do it.'

A telling point was made by a Bihar Member of Parliament when he pleaded with Jayaprakash to desist from becoming a leader of the Opposition Front, as that would drive them into opposition to him, which was the last thing they wanted to do. The Bihar M.P.s were obviously unhappy about the demand for the dissolution of the Assembly which would place them in a quandary. Jayaprakash's reply was friendly, but blunt. He said:

What can I advise you? It is for you to resolve the situation. You

should have the guts and be prepared for sacrifices. The difficulty is that most of you are office-seekers. It is too late to say all that you have said. I don't think any Congressman who knows what has happened in Patna and Bihar during the last month will have the cheek to say anything of that sort now.

Predictably, certain members of the Congress leadership were extremely unhappy about this get together between Congress Members of Parliament and Jayaprakash. Not surprisingly, it was the Communist fellow-travellers inside the Congress who raised howls of protest and described the meeting as a move to divide the party.

By contrast, the Prime Minister herself showed no visible signs of annoyance. On the contrary, she exuded reasonableness: 'If some member comes and tells me that he wants to meet Mr. Narayan or invite him to his residence, how can I prevent him from doing so?'

Chandrasekhar's tea party evidently continued to rankle because the matter bobbed up again when Congressmen gathered at Narora for the AICC National Camp on 22 November. Some of those present were at great pains to explain away their presence at the reception given to Jayaprakash.

It appears that a thirteen page secret document was circulated at the camp at Narora and that this formed the basis for discussion. In the course of its perambulations, the document said:

'Behind the facade of a partyless democracy lurk dark forces of Indian fascism well-organised and well-poised to destroy the democratic institutions and impose a reign of terror. The Jan Sangh, the RSS and the Anand Marg are the driving forces behind the assault on the citadel of democracy.'

'When it falls, they will move quickly to occupy positions of vantage. The result can be predicted. A naked dictatorship of the propertied classes will come into existence. It will appeal to the most retrogressive tendencies in our social and political life. Communalism, regional chauvinism and fanaticism of all kinds and a narrow, life-denying cultural revivalism will thrive.'

'It is not accidental that these forces should strive to challenge democracy at a time of grave economic difficulties. Again, it is not accidental that in posing this challenge, they should seek to confuse the public mind by employing a variety of ruses, such as the call to end corruption, the raising of the issue of electoral reforms. And

finally, it is not mere coincidence that the parties which have joined the campaign against democracy are simultaneously opposing our whole concept of planning and the Congress policy of cooperation with the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries.'

The Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, sought to give her own interpretation of the class character of the Bihar agitation about this time. Speaking to East German journalists on 29 November, she said: 'It is more the upper middle class which are behind the Bihar agitation.' According to her, the working class and rural people 'by and large' were not involved.

Deb Kanta Barooah, the Congress President, who supported an alliance with the C.P.I., had a fling at Jayaprakash at Calcutta airport on 12 December when he referred to J.P.'s warning to Congressmen to beware of Communists: 'Let him look to his own companions—communists, adventurists and reactionaries', a reference no doubt to the C.P.(M)'s limited support to Jayaprakash.

The Prime Minister herself kept up the barrage of criticism against Jayaprakash throughout this period. Thus, speaking at Lucknow on 15 December, she came up with a novel argument that Jayaprakash's agitation sought to deny the common people the right to express themselves. 'The agitation is aimed at gagging the common man. This cannot be allowed to happen', she said. Another amazing remark she made was that Jayaprakash and his friends were opposed to Mahatma Gandhi and Congress stalwarts like Sardar Patel during the 1942 Freedom Movement. This was a breath-taking suggestion because, as everyone knew, it was Jayaprakash who had kept up the 'Quit India' struggle after the Congress leaders had been locked up by the British. The Prime Minister forgot to mention that it was her Communist allies who acted as traitors throughout that campaign and had supported the British Government under the plea that the war had ceased to be an Imperialist war and had become a 'people's war'.

The Communists on their part took credit for the alleged halting of Jayaprakash's agitation. A report on political developments at the Tenth Bihar State Conference of the C.P.I. at Hazaribagh claimed that the current reactionary led offensive had been halted as a result of the initiative and combativeness of the C.P.I.

On 28 December, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi attended in Bombay a meeting organised by the Indian National Trade Union

Congress, a Trade Union federation affiliated to the Congress Party. She stepped up sharply her attack on the Bihar movement and charged that 'blood stained hands' were behind it. 'Those who are using the name of Gandhiji are also accepting the assistance of the very people who killed him', she asserted. Asked 'who then will eradicate corruption?' she answered mockingly 'Is it the Jan Singh or the Socialist Party?' In yet another wild statement, characteristic of her pronouncements during this period, she went on to say that the demand for Proportional Representation would mean that women, Harijans and the backward classes would not get adequate representation, overlooking the fact that it was precisely these elements that stood to benefit from Proportional Representation as it was the only known method of representing minorities and depressed elements of the population.

While all these fiery pronouncements were being made, the Bihar State Government made a conciliatory gesture by revoking the externment orders served on some prominent persons. namely, S.M. Joshi, Bhai Mahavir, Siddharaj Dhadha and Samar Guha. The State Government also ordered the release of Ramanand Tiwari who had been held under MISA since 1 October.

It was during this period that speculation mounted in Delhi and elsewhere on the possibility of the Prime Minister advising the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha a year ahead of the termination of its normal life, as she had done in December 1970. While some political parties repeated their miserable performance of five years ago in whining and complaining at being caught with their pants down in this manner, Jayaprakash struck the right note when he said that he would not oppose any decision to dissolve Parliament and have an early election. However, he voiced his reservation by saying that 'if it is done at the cost of the Constitution, all people should oppose it'.

Coordination

Jayaprakash came up to Delhi to meet members of the Opposition parties and others in a Conference which he convened. On 25 November about fifty persons, many of them leaders of non-communist Opposition parties and a few individuals from various walks of life met in a two day Conference to consider two specific questions: 'In what way can the supporters of the movement in

Bihar and other States help the people's struggle in Bihar? And how can pressure be brought to bear on the Central Government and persuade it to change its policies in, particular its anti-people attitude in Bihar?"

Charan Singh, leader of the B.L.D., who presided over the morning session on the first day, repeated the invitation that he had already extended in private a couple of days earlier to Jayaprakash to lead a 'national alternative'. This invitation J.P. flatly refused. He said it would be a grievous mistake to consider the movement as a clash between the Opposition and the ruling party. What was being witnessed in Bihar was a spontaneous outburst, a people's movement which possibly encompassed the combined strength of the Opposition parties, but also transcended it. He explained that the demand for the resignation of the Ministry and the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly was not the main objective of the Bihar struggle. He conceded that

one rather unfortunate but inescapable result of this has been that the basic issues of the struggle have been pushed to the background for the time being and the resignation of the Ministry and the dissolution of the Assembly have come to occupy the centre of the battleground. This could have been avoided if the Bihar Chief Minister, like the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. Karunanidhi, had offered his cooperation, but it is now eight months too late—eight months of unprecedented repression by his own government.

In answer to the question as to why he had convened this meeting, Jayaprakash replied: 'The struggle in Bihar is not just a flash in the pan of history but a continuing process of revolutionary struggle. That is why I have called it a struggle for total revolution.' He said he was aware of the fact that such a revolution could not take place in a single State in isolation from the rest of the country. 'It is for this reason that we are concerned at this conference with the extension of the struggle to other States.'

After the leaders of the various political parties had made their suggestions, Jayaprakash, summing up the discussion, expressed disappointment that, while political leaders had promised him their support, they had not come forward with any specific outline on how they proposed to help the Bihar movement and its extension to other States. Neither had they worked out the details of the proposed

gherao of Parliament. Jayaprakash suggested that 'Bihar Day' be observed all over the country on which people could *gherao* all Assemblies and Secretariats for a day.

Jayaprakash repudiated the allegation that he did not believe in parliamentary democracy. 'Until something better is evolved, such as participatory democracy from the grassroots, I very much want the parliamentary set-up to remain. In fact, let it be understood', he emphasised, that 'I have never used the word parallel Government which is attributed to me. I have always mentioned a people's government.'

He advised the leaders of the various political parties gathered at the Conference not to contest elections on a party basis. He suggested that there should be only two candidates, one put up by the ruling party and another representing the people (the Janata Pratinidhi).

During J.P.'s visit to Delhi, a National Coordinating Committee was set up to carry on liaison work and other activities. Similarly, a Coordinating Committee of students was also formed in New Delhi on 25 November.

Jayaprakash's meetings in Delhi and the success he achieved provoked the Soviet News Agency Tass to observe in a despatch from Moscow of 27 November:

The revolutionary forces in India are trying to identify their subversion against the democratic gains of the Indian people. This is evident from the decisions of the recent conference of the right-wing opposition parties at which Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan, advocate of reactionaries and the motley conglomeration of right wing forces, including representations from the communal party the Jan Sangh, the opposition parties, the Bharatiya Lok Dal, and the Congress (O) and semi-fascist organisations of the Ananda Marga type were included. And how should this be combated?... The pressing need now is for united action by the C.P.I. and other left and democratic forces including progressive elements of the Indian National Congress.

Dutifully echoing Tass, the C.P.I. appealed to the C.P.(M.) and the Socialists to dissociate themselves from the Bihar movement. 'The reactionary forces may talk soft to you now, but once they capture power, they will not tolerate anything progressive or

democratic. That is the lesson of history and of Chile recently.'

Kurukshetra

From Delhi Jayaprakash moved on to Haryana where he had been invited by the students of Kurukshetra University and the Haryana Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti. The Youth Congress workers organised a black-flag procession and stoned J.P.'s motorcade. Carrying sticks, some of them stopped the motorcade, shouted anti-J.P. slogans and stoned some of the cars until the police intervened and dispersed them. These Congress workers had arrived in Kurukshetra from distant districts of Haryana, taking a free ride in the State Transport buses. They were extended considerable cooperation by the district officials. Many people who wanted to reach this small town were strongly discouraged by the police. A press photographer, Raghu Rai of *The Statesman*, was injured in the head by a lathi blow resulting in profuse bleeding.

Many prominent Jayaprakash supporters and local leaders were arrested in Kurukshetra and nearby districts by the police on the eve of the visit. Hours before he arrived in the city, Government officials brought school students to the main street to protest against his visit. At Karnal, some two hundred persons made an unsuccessful bid to *gherao* Jayaprakash's car and prevent him from proceeding to Kurukshetra.

The Haryana Chief Minister Bansi Lal should know, said J.P., from the huge crowd attending the meeting that the steps taken to prevent the meeting taking place had failed miserably:

There is no difference between the Prime Minister and the Haryana Chief Minister, both of whom are bent upon strangling democracy in the country. They are repeatedly giving us sermons on democracy and accusing me of attacking democratic principles. But I want to ask both of them from which book on democracy they have learnt to obstruct people from even exchanging views?

Uttar Pradesh

During this period, Jayaprakash made more than one foray from Bihar to the neighbouring region of Eastern U.P., where the socio-economic conditions were not so different from those

prevailing in his home state.

On 8 December, addressing a mammoth meeting in Balia, J.P. advised Congressmen not to leave their party but to fight those within their organisation who were opposing total revolution.

There were several reasons why the answer to Jayaprakash's call was as formidable as it was in Balia. First, it was one of the poorest places in the country. Second, it had a revolutionary background right from the days of the Mutiny when the local hero of 1857, Mangal Pandey, was sent to the gallows. Similarly, during the 'Quit India' movement of 1942, the town of Balia was ruled by freedom fighters for seven days before the British Government could re-establish its hold. Finally, there was the fact that Jayaprakash belonged to the village of Sitabdiara which lay between the rivers Sarju and Ganga. Originally, Sitabdiara was situated in the Saran district of Bihar. The Sarju river, however, kept changing its course and the border between Bihar and Uttar Pradesh had in consequence to be readjusted some years back. That part of Sitabdiara village where Jayaprakash had his home then found itself in Balia district of U.P., and is now officially known as Jayaprakashnagar. Some of his land however lies across the river Sarju. Jayaprakash thus belongs to both these States.

The position was somewhat different when it came to organising forces sympathetic with the Bihar campaign in Eastern U.P. This became clear when Jayaprakash visited Varanasi from 25 to 27 December in response to the invitation extended by local sympathisers including those of the Jan Sangh, the S.S.P. and the B.L.D. I happened to be present during part of that visit and there can be no doubt that the response was disappointing. While it is true that Jayaprakash had his usual mammoth meeting which he addressed on 27 December in Varanasi, it was clear that organisational preparations did not warrant a visit by Jayaprakash, and that the local people had neither done their homework nor come to terms among themselves.

When Jayaprakash drove to attend what had been planned as a private meeting at the Guest House at the historic place of Sarnath, he was appalled to find that a crowd of odd people who were not among the invitees had gatecrashed into the hall due to the absence of proper volunteer arrangements. Within minutes of the meeting starting, the B.L.D. and the J.S. spokesmen were in a heated argument. Sitting with the press at the back of the hall, I could not but feel

sorry that Jayaprakash should be exposed to such a situation. Even after the uproar had been quelled, the statements made by a series of local political workers seemed to consist of emotional exhortations devoid of any organisational content. It hurt me to hear a pressman sitting near me making catty remarks.

When at last Jayaprakash's turn came to speak, his disappointment came through in spite of his gentle manner and tone. He chided the students for their craze to become leaders and to secure places on the Chhatra Sangharsh Samitis, and he mentioned several other weaknesses which, unless they were overcome, would make the movement flounder. Thus Jayaprakash referred to the fact that there were some discrepancies to be found in the number of coupons which had been issued in Bihar for collecting small contributions and the number of coupons that had been accounted for. Even though these discrepancies were of a marginal nature, he was candid enough to refer to them. Unfortunately, one or two pressmen, though not others, blew this up to the proportions of a major scandal, with the result that J.P. had to refer to the matter in various speeches he made for several weeks in order to cut things down to proper size.

Turning to the warring political parties who had just made an exhibition of their party-mindedness, he went on to observe somewhat facetiously that insofar as the Jan Sangh was concerned they would undoubtedly feel that a total revolution had been accomplished as soon as A. B. Vajpayee or L.K. Advani became the Prime Minister and, so far as the B.L.D. was concerned, a total revolution would mean Charan Singh becoming the Prime Minister. He then went on to explain how his concept of a total revolution was so different from theirs. To him capture of power was not the end, but merely a means to an end which was the welfare of the people.

Jayaprakash then went on to deplore the formation of rival Chhatra Sangharsh Samitis and Jana Sangharsh Samitis in several places in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. In Varanasi itself, rival samitis had been formed even in mohallas. Jayaprakash deplored all this because he felt that if the Bihar movement did not spread to other States a great opportunity to effect basic changes throughout the country might be lost. Reverting to the political parties, Jayaprakash observed: 'The political parties thought I was wasting my time for twenty years. They do not understand politics. They say I was in the wilderness. It is Delhi that is the wilderness. I was where the people live. I spent two years trying to get a national consensus.'

Jayaprakash observed that the movement stood on four pillars: (a) propaganda and publicity meetings; (b) organisation; (c) struggle; and (d) constructive work. Jayaprakash held that creating a people's movement was also constructive work.

In the car on the way back from the meeting I found that Jayaprakash too was disappointed at the turn the meeting had taken.

Opposition Party Attitudes

By the end of 1974 the disarray among the political parties supporting Jayaprakash was becoming pointed and unconcealed. Each of them adopted a posture of its own and not many of them fitted in with the others.

Thus the Jan Sangh's proposal for a united bloc in Parliament was rejected in the beginning of December by the B.L.D. Chairman, Charan Singh, who insisted that no good would come out of the move unless it was accompanied by the formation of a single party. He added that his party was not prepared to fight an election as the partner in a United Front since such a front serves to keep various parties alive and divided, which eminently suits the Congress purpose. It was his view that a polarisation of parties could not be achieved through a people's movement. It was a political party which could be the instrument of change. He asserted that a strong national alternative could not emerge from the movement. The only alternative would have to be a single party, but he did not go on to explain to which party he referred.

At this point, the Jan Sangh leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, injected a dose of realism into the dialogue by announcing on 8 December his decision to resign from the membership of the Lok Sabha. He explained that the two considerations that prompted him to take this decision were, first, that parliamentary democracy was no longer an effective instrument to serve the people in India and had become a means to acquire power and prestige and, second, that Parliament had been reduced to a mere rubber stamp to serve the ends of the party in power. Vajpayee marred the effect of his announcement by mentioning that he would submit his letter of resignation to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha only after getting his party's clearance. The effect of the gesture was further marred when the Jan Sangh President, Advani, promptly told newsmen: 'I do not

think we will be able to spare him from Parliamentary work but a decision has to be taken by the Parliamentary Board.' Ultimately, the move was dropped.

The Communist Party (Marxist) continued throughout this period to sit on the fence and to blow hot and cold towards Jayaprakash's campaign. Its Central Committee, while announcing its decision not to associate itself with the All-India Coordination Committee and the Bihar Sangharsh Samiti, because they had included avowedly 'reactionary' parties like the Jan Sangh, B.L.D. and Congress (O), offered, however, to keep in close touch with Jayaprakash so that their activities could be synchronised on specific occasions while preserving its independent position. The C.P.(M) announced that it fully agreed with Jayaprakash on issues like *jana-shakti* (people's power) and total revolution but differed on the mode of utilising that power to bring about a revolution. While Jayaprakash wanted a revolution on Sarvodaya and Gandhian lines, the C.P.(M) wanted revolution on the lines chalked out by Marx and Lenin.

Like the B.L.D., which had objected to its list of candidates being scrutinised by Jayaprakash or his organs of people's power, Jyoti Basu also declared on 16 December that, in the event of elections in Bihar, the C.P.(M) would nominate its candidates and fight elections on its own.

The Socialist Party on the other hand, at its meeting in Calicut on 28 and 29 December, offered full support to make Jayaprakash's campaign a nationwide one but accompanied these assurances with the rider that its success would depend on the ability to politicise the non-politicised sections of the people.

Finally, those in the Swatantra Party who had refused to join the B.L.D. got together in Madras on 8 December to revive the national organisation of the Party with K. Sundaram as its President. The first resolution that they passed was one of whole-hearted support to Jayaprakash's campaign.

This notwithstanding, Jayaprakash had a two-day meeting with Opposition leaders in Delhi in February 1975, when two decisions were taken; one was that a Charter of Demands should be presented to Parliament by a mammoth *morcha* or procession on 6 March in which a large number of people were expected to come in from the neighbouring States and join the citizens of Delhi. The other decision was to start a nation-wide campaign against the State of Emergency which had been very undemocratically continued since

the last war with Pakistan. It was decided that as a part of that campaign, demonstrations should be organised on 6 April. It appears as if this campaign was expected to forestall any attempt by those in authority in Delhi to move to a one party dictatorship as has emerged in Bangladesh.

Early in 1975, Jayaprakash toured Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. While in Bardoli, the hometown of Sardar Vallabhai Patel, he paid a tribute to Patel of whom he had been somewhat inordinately critical in the past. As a socialist leader, he had naturally looked upon Sardar Patel as a conservative and traditionalist. Now he made belated amends by saying: 'I do believe now that, a realist and pragmatist, Sardar Patel would have been a better choice than Nehru who never had his feet on the ground and had his head above the clouds.'

By-Elections

Meanwhile, the country was shaken by the results of the two by-elections in Madhya Pradesh, one to the State Assembly and the other to the Lok Sabha. The first of these was a by-election to the State Assembly from Govindpura (Bhopal) Constituency where the 'people's candidate' trounced the Congress-C.P.I. nominee by a wide margin of 12,839 votes. This was referred to by some newspapers as a 'New Year gift' to the Sarvodaya leader. Even more rewarding for Jayaprakash was the result of the Parliamentary by-election in Jabalpur which came soon after his own visit to the State. Here again, the 'people's candidate', who stood on a non-party symbol with the support of various parties, obtained a convincing majority of 87,382 votes in a constituency which had been held for the Congress Party by the veteran Congress Member, Seth Govindas, without a break since Independence. Was this a portent of what was to come?

Jayaprakash referred to this development as being 'a pointer' towards the emerging shape of things but cautioned that what would happen would depend on 'how we look at this victory, what lesson we learn from it and to what purpose we utilise it'.

Electoral Reform

In February 1975, the Committee to recommend Electoral

Reform, on which some of us had been working for several months, was at last able to complete its work and prepare its report after taking the evidence of a certain number of individuals and examining the memoranda submitted by a large number of political parties and others. The highlight of the report is the unanimity of opinion that the present system of election of 'first past the post', borrowed from the British, does not lead to a fair reflection of the popular will and indeed that the distortion of that will, reflected in the results of successive elections to the Lok Sabha and many State Assemblies, has reached altogether intolerable proportions. The Report points out that, in the quarter century of the life of the Constitution, in no election had the ruling party at the Centre won more than a minority of the votes polled and yet it had commanded an artificially swollen majority in the Lok Sabha which had enabled it to amend the Constitution in basic respects. This distortion had created a situation where there was a danger of people losing faith in democratic institutions and the electoral process. The Committee suggested that in place of this archaic system there should be a mixed system of proportional representation such as that which is practised in West Germany and which has resulted in stable and good government.

Among other proposals made by the Committee are those for limiting the use of funds in elections, eliminating the abuse of administrative machinery, changes in the electoral procedure and the process of ballot and counting of votes, and the restructuring of the functions of the Election Commission so that it may inspire more widespread confidence.

Mishra Murder

Jayaprakash was in Delhi on 2 January 1975, when news was received that the Railway Minister, L.N. Mishra, had been killed as a result of a bomb explosion in Samastipur in North Bihar. After expressing his distress at this development and sending his sympathies to the family, Jayaprakash asked for a 'thorough and in-depth probe' not by the Bihar Government, whom he described as 'incompetent to do anything', but by the Union Government. Condemning the murder, Jayaprakash said: 'The politics of assassination has been raising its head in parts of Bihar for some time. . . . I have always believed that murders can never solve any of our problems nor

can revolutions come through acts of terrorism.'

Nonetheless, S.A. Dange, the communist leader, found it possible to interpret Mishra's murder as 'murder by proxy of the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi' and the Prime Minister herself saw the murder as part of 'a dangerous plan' and 'a rehearsal'. Jayaprakash, however, refused to react and dismissed the Prime Minister's remarks as 'an attempt on her part with the help of the C.P.I. to whip up hysteria in the country'.

Threat of Arrest

It looked as if a question which a lot of people had been asking themselves: 'Will Jayaprakash be arrested?' was about to be answered when Chief Minister Ghafoor told newsmen in New Delhi on 30 January 1975, that drastic action including the arrest of Jayaprakash would be taken should he resume his agitation at the end of his tour of Eastern U.P., where Jayaprakash happened to be then.

The reaction to the threat was swift and widespread. That the Opposition leaders should express their anger was only to be expected, but it is significant that Congress M.P., Krishna Kant, described the threat as 'an unwise and cynical act which would damage the Congress'. The press reaction too was uniformly adverse. It would appear that Ghafoor was shaken by all this because, on 31 January, he blandly told newsmen that 'the question of Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan's arrest does not arise'.

While there were press reports that the Prime Minister had done some 'plain speaking' to the Bihar Chief Minister and the Home Minister dismissed it as an 'off-the-cuff remark' by Ghafoor, there were others who took the view that there could not be all this smoke without some fire and that perhaps this was either kite-flying or a premature disclosure of what was being seriously considered.

The Big March

These alarms and excursions proved, however, to be exaggerated in the light of later developments that culminated in the Big March in Delhi on 6 March 1975, the anniversary of the massive protest led by Mahatma Gandhi against the enactment of the infamous Rowlatt Act by the British administration. Not only did this massive march, where several hundreds of thousands of people

peacefully participated, prove the continuing upsurge of public opinion behind Jayaprakash, not only did it show his capacity to make political parties shed their banners and insignia on the occasion, but the manner in which the authorities on their part joined in maintaining the peace and the grace with which the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Vice-President as Chairman of the Rajya Sabha extended the courtesies normal in democratic life to the Sarvodaya leader, who went to present to them a charter of demands, showed that the climate for continuing a dialogue and a civil confrontation was being maintained. This augured well for the future.

8 *The Outlook*

In January 1969 I was asked by the Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs to deliver the fourth Rajaji Birthday Lecture. I was then General Secretary of the Swatantra Party and a Member of Parliament. I chose as my subject the theme 'Too Much Politics, Too Little Citizenship'.

In my talk I raised some rather basic issues. One of these was that, as a result of the intrusion of the State in, and the politicisation of, every walk of life, popular initiative had shrivelled and the common people were apt to talk about 'we' and 'they' and to blame everything on 'them'. I pointed out that this thinking was all wrong. If 'they' were guilty, then each of us was also guilty, since the daily exercise of vigilance was the price of liberty. Pointing out that what we lacked in India was what the Americans call 'grass-roots' democracy, voluntary action at the level of the farm, the village and the town, I suggested we should call it 'rice-roots' activity in our own country. 'Hundreds of voluntary organisations', I said, 'are required to work for causes, to fight evils, to expose them. Each one of us has the obligation to participate in one or the other of them. Passivity is the enemy of freedom.' I reminded my audience of the old saying that 'all that is necessary for bad men to triumph is for good men to do nothing'.

This warning about the absence of an infrastructure in our democratic life, with the Government and the parties floating on top with nothing below to anchor or root them in the minds and lives of the people, particularly in the countryside, went unnoticed for all practical purposes.

In March 1974, the magazine 'Z' asked me to give them an interview and put some difficult and awkward questions to me. By that time, it was clear to me that the erosion in our democracy to which I had drawn attention in 1969 had advanced very much further. Not only had the style of the Government changed from a meddling, inefficiently democratic one to one with authoritarian

overtones, but that the Government had misused its parliamentary position, based on the archaic British electoral system of 'first past the post', to undermine the Fundamental Rights of the citizen and the independence of the judiciary. It appeared to me that we were well on the way to a Marxist take over.

By that time, I was neither a Member of Parliament nor actively involved in the functioning of any political party. When asked whether I thought that if the Swatantra Party took power it could do a better job, I answered in the negative and said:

I think perhaps we have got past the stage when a political party could do what you want. In that sense, Mrs. Gandhi is a kind of de Gaulle who came to power on the ruins of the Fourth Republic and you cannot now go back to the Fourth Republic. I have described her as the de Gaulle that failed. I would be inclined to think that we are now entering a revolutionary situation. I fear, though I am a very strong democrat, that for a while extra-constitutional forces may take over. We are beginning to see them already. Look at Gujarat. I deplore the methods used. It is terrible to overthrow governments this way. The democratic safety valves have been destroyed by Mrs. Gandhi and her methods.

It is against this background that the emergence of Jayaprakash on the national scene, playing the kind of active role that he has been doing since the beginning of 1974, can be evaluated.

What a change has come over the scene! In place of despondency, there is now hope. In place of cowardice, there is courage at least in some quarters. There is a feeling that people can save themselves, that things can change, and not necessarily for the worse, and that there is no need to look for liberation to extraneous quarters like the Armed Forces. The 'we' and 'they' are still there, but there is a feeling that 'we' can replace or displace 'them'. There is no doubt that the credit for this must go to some extent to the students and youth of Gujarat and, of course, for the rest, to Jayaprakash Narayan.

When, therefore, J.P. asked me to join the National Executive Council of the Citizens for Democracy on 12 June 1974, I gladly responded to the invitation.

I responded to J.P.'s plea for 'total revolution' and his belief that hope for India lay neither through elections nor Parliament. As

I saw it, Jayaprakash was rejuvenating India's political life and in his own way was infusing vitality into the democratic system. He has already shaken the *status quo* that has lasted over the last two decades. I felt that J.P.'s campaign was essentially Gandhian in that it was an open revolution, the aims of which were openly stated and publicised for all to know. In a way it was the first genuine mass movement that India had witnessed since Independence and I felt that perhaps Jayaprakash could do what Rajaji and we had failed to accomplish. It was clear to me that nobody else could do what he is endeavouring to do because there is nobody else today who enjoys the charisma, credibility and leadership that have made masses of people throughout the country rally round him. Not for nothing is he regarded widely as 'democracy's best and last hope'.

Many strands have merged into the making of the man. His entire record of three score and ten years is made up of four outstanding urges: love of individual liberty, love of the country, a passion for social justice, and deep religious and spiritual values. These four strands run throughout his entire public life extending over four and a half decades, at times running parallel, at other times intertwining and at yet others crossing one another.

Decades of withdrawal from active power politics and of moving around the countryside, studying developments in Naxalbari and Musahari, collecting surplus land and distributing it to the landless, all these have prepared Jayaprakash for the vital role that he has now to play.

This does not mean that there is no room for the considerable amount of doubt, discussion and speculation that has been caused by Jayaprakash's present activities. There are unquestionably areas of ambiguity. Only the most cocksure would claim that the outlook is clear and leaves no room for uncertainty and consequent concern. There are no guarantees possible in regard to the successful outcome of the agitation. No revolution could ever take place if such guarantees were to be demanded. No study or evaluation of such an agitation, not even a fragmentary one such as this, could avoid dealing with such doubts and questioning.

J.P.'s Health

A large section of people are apprehensive that the outlook is precarious because of J.P.'s age and the state of his health. They

fear that if he were to be removed from the scene, the entire effort would collapse and we would be back to square one.

In a telling speech to a mass gathering on 5 June 1974, Jayaprakash gave his own answer to this question:

Nobody, Jayaprakash Narayan or anyone else, can stop this movement. It has been born because the system of education is rotten and the students don't see a ray of hope. It was born because the people are being crushed under high prices. There is corruption and bribery everywhere. Unemployment goes on rising both of the educated and others. Otherwise a thousand Jayaprakash Narayans and a thousand Chhatra Sangharsh Samitis could not have created a mass movement like this. There is fire in the hearts of the people. Countless children in Bihar go to sleep without food. I see numerous people getting emaciated. There is a barber in my own village. I was appalled to see how thin he has grown. When I asked Ramusudha Thakur why he was so reduced, he replied that there was nothing for him to eat. I don't know how people manage to live. What do they eat? After the death of my wife, I have had to keep an account of my expenses and I am amazed at the amount I have to spend on food alone. Without the interest from the Magasaysay Award and the help of some generous friends, I too would have possibly had to starve.

Having watched Jayaprakash since his return from Vellore for the past few months, I for one see no great reason to share the apprehensions about his health. Nobody of course can foresee the future in this regard, and there is no doubt that Jayaprakash needs to conserve his energies. At the same time, one may recall that Konrad Adenauer was seventy-three when he became West Germany's first post-war Chancellor and he remained in that onerous position and managed the affairs of his country for no less than fourteen years. De Gaulle retired when he was seventy-nine. Both Mao and Tito are over eighty.

Why Bihar?

The fact that this upsurge has taken place in Bihar is not by any means an accident. Harsh as it may sound, not only is Bihar one of the most backward States in the Indian Union but

what makes this even more poignant is the fact that Bihar is endowed with richer natural resources than any other part of India. Many years ago when I wrote my little book, *Our India*, I had complained that Nature had not distributed her favours evenly and ended up by saying: 'These Biharis do seem to have all the luck, don't they?'

Man, however, in the form of those who rule in Patna and Delhi, has thwarted the kindly designs of Nature, with the result that in 1974 Bihar presented a picture of tragic desolation, with a devastating combination of floods, drought, smallpox and strikes by sections of Government employees as a result of which some 30,000 people died and production worth Rs. 500 crores was lost. It was no wonder then that the State was bankrupt.

Jayaprakash himself has talked about this:

Look, friends, for one thousand years the history of India was the history of Bihar. From the age of the Mauryas to the last Gupta, Bihar was synonymous with India. For one thousand years this very city—Pataliputra—was one of the largest cities in the world, and a vital centre of culture and knowledge. And look at Patna today! Bihar has such fertile land, land which can yield a harvest of gold. Bihar has such perennial rivers—here flows the Ganga, the Kosi and the Gandak. And yet, here is where we starve. Why? Is it the fault of the people that they starve? Is it the fault of the leadership, all those who have been in power? Bihar has the richest mineral resources of all Indian States. And yet Bihar is the poorest state, the most backward. Aren't these people ashamed to sit in the chairs of authority? What have they done to develop industry? What have they done to develop anything at all except cultivating their own interests? Oh yes, some have built their own bungalows and have bought land. But what have they done for the people?... Let our life be so transformed that Bihar would once again attain the glory it had attained during the reign of Emperor Ashoka.

Perhaps it was as a measure to pull the State out of this morass that Jayaprakash suggested, at a public meeting in Poona on 27 January 1975, that Bihar be divided into three separate and more manageable States, namely, Northern Bihar, Southern Bihar and Chhota Nagpur which the Adivasis of that region call Jharkhand.

State or Nation First?

Ever since Jayaprakash launched on his campaign, he has been faced with the dilemma of whether to confine his agitation to Bihar or to help spread it throughout the country, and it is perhaps not unnatural that he should have oscillated between these two alternatives. By the middle of the year, and particularly after his return from Vellore, invitations to visit other parts of the country had begun to pour in and, while resisting most of them, Jayaprakash started responding to the plea of friends and sympathisers outside Bihar. The story of these sorties has already been told.

There is a great deal to be said both in support of these visits to other places and against them. Obviously, the tremendous crowds and mammoth meetings that have listened to Jayaprakash must have acted as a morale booster not only to him but to his supporters in Bihar. Jayaprakash has also adduced a philosophical argument in favour of this by saying that he never supported Stalin's slogan of 'socialism in one country'. Presumably, therefore, he is even less in favour of the liberation of Bihar only, while the rest of the country continues to be a victim of misgovernment and corruption. It can also be argued that no liberation of Bihar can be achieved since, under the Federal Constitution, the Government at the Centre can not only throttle Bihar economically, but can even interfere flagrantly with the working of the autonomy of the State by dissolving the State Assembly at will, as it did in Kerala earlier, and can impose President's rule which in reality would be rule by the Central Government. Obviously, therefore, there could be no liberated Bihar without a liberated India.

Nobody has suggested that the success of the campaign in Bihar should be an end in itself or the end of the road. Those who have argued that the campaign should be mainly limited to Bihar have done so because they have felt that organisationally this was the right strategy and would in fact give the best and quickest results. In a way, it is a question of utilising and mobilising one's manpower and scarce resources. There is such a thing as spreading the butter so thin that one can no longer taste it. Having been with Jayaprakash in Varanasi on Christmas Day and for a day on 20 January in Ahmedabad where I had gone to inaugurate the Conference of the Citizens for Democracy, as also in Bombay later, it would appear as if on balance the advantage lies in Jayaprakash concentrating on making his

total revolution in Bihar a success rather than on straining his physical resources in travelling from one end of the country to the other.

Perhaps Jayaprakash himself had come to a similar conclusion judging by the fact that at his final public meeting on Republic Day at Shivaji Park in Bombay, which was generally described by the press as the biggest meeting there in living memory, he announced that he had cancelled his plan for visiting South India and elsewhere and would from now on dedicate himself to the pursuit of the cause in Bihar. There would be only two exceptions to this—one, to make occasional visits to Delhi which were necessary, and the other, visits to Eastern U.P. which, as far as he was concerned, formed part of the same natural region as Bihar with common physical features, common stock and a common dialect. He might also have added that Bihar and Eastern U.P. can claim to share Jayaprakash.

That it is not necessary for Jayaprakash to visit various parts of the country in order that the example of Bihar may be followed was proved by the virtual endorsement of Jayaprakash's campaign by the Tamilnad Congress Committee (O) and by the fact that, on 16 February, a non-party organisation called the Navnirmana Kranthi was brought into existence in Bangalore for the State of Mysore, which its organisers claim has the same aims as those of J.P.'s campaign and which would seek to evolve a new style in politics.

Rural or Urban Revolution?

Various criticisms have been made in regard to the organisation of the campaign in Bihar. One such comment is that though Jayaprakash is very much a rural man his support in Bihar has been mainly urban in character. When I put this doubt to him, Jayaprakash corrected me by saying:

No, in fact the main work today is in the villages. It started as an urban movement because it was the students who started it. In Bihar it has penetrated into the remote villages and it has become a village movement, and this is what it is. The non-Adivasis of Chhota Nagpur are also involved, but the Adivasis not so much. The difficulty with them is that the college students who are Adivasis get a stipend. They have formed a Jharkhand

Navnirman Samiti. They told me that they can't do anything because their stipends will otherwise be taken away.

Everyman's has reported on two surveys made in this connection, one in June 1974 and the other at the end of the year. The earlier one, which was a poll taken of *satyagrahis* to be found in Bihar prisons at that time, showed that 80 per cent of the *satyagrahis* came from rural areas, while the latest survey has corroborated the fact that a decisive majority come from the villages. The allegation that the backward classes have kept aloof from Jayaprakash's movement is also refuted by the second poll which shows that no less than 40 per cent of the four hundred *satyagrahis* arrested in the Saran District in October 1974 belonged to the backward or Scheduled classes.

Youth : the New Leaders?

When I once asked Jayaprakash why he had concentrated on youth, his reply was interesting. He said:

You and I have gone through the socialist phase. You were not a Marxist in the same sense as I was, but I was a confirmed Marxist and we believed in the leadership of the industrial working classes in a revolution. Now, the Indian industrial working class is more or less a petit bourgeois class. Their standard of living is higher than the living standards of the lower middle-class, for instance. If you compare their wages with the wages of agricultural labour, they (the industrial working class) are much better off. So I don't think they are a revolutionary force at all. They will always be in the sphere of 'economism'. From what has happened generally in the USA, in Japan and recently in Indonesia and Thailand, I worked it out in my mind that it is the youth who must take the lead in this, and history proves me to be correct.

I mentioned to Jayaprakash that there was some criticism that he was counting too much on his charisma to see him through and was not giving adequate attention to creating a cadre of workers. To this his answer was:

As far as cadres are concerned, we have been trying in Bihar to train new cadres and I have been revolving in my mind a

programme for one lakh volunteers for a Chhatra Yuva Sangharsha Vahini. These will be people who will have no attachment to any political party, no attachment to any student or youth organisation which has political affiliations.

Yet another criticism has been that Jayaprakash was not attending to the important question of succession as every good leader should. To this Jayaprakash's comment was:

I don't think it will be possible for any individual to take the place which somehow has been given to me. It must be, I suppose, a group of people. At the national level it will be very difficult. Well I do not know how many years I have in store. It can't be helped. It can't be manufactured. Like the revolution, it will have to come.

Dissolution of the Assembly

Perhaps there has been more debate about the legitimacy or otherwise of the demand by Jayaprakash and his followers for the dissolution of the Bihar Legislative Assembly than on any other aspect. The Prime Minister and her supporters have denounced this demand as 'undemocratic' and the Communists and their fellow-travellers have naturally gone one better and denounced it as 'fascist'. The argument is that whoever challenges the right of those who have been given a mandate to rule at a popular election is thwarting the functioning of democracy.

This point of view can of course be challenged at various levels. First of all, Jayaprakash is not trying to substitute a government *not* elected by the people in Bihar in place of one that *is*. All he is demanding is that this particular government, that has demonstrated its corrupt nature and has forfeited the support of the people of Bihar, should resign, that the Assembly should be dissolved and that a fresh election should be called for, *precisely* so that the people of Bihar may elect a more representative government.

J.P.'s own rejoinder on this point is clear:

'The Bihar movement, while demanding electoral reform in order to make elections as fair and free, as inexpensive and as representative as possible, does not aim at establishing a partyless

democracy. . . . That 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.

The issue, therefore, is one of dissolution of Parliament or a popular elected legislature. Jayaprakash's opponents are cashing in on the ignorance of the parliamentary system that prevails in this country as a result of the purely accidental fact that the Lok Sabha and most State Assemblies happened, by and large, to last the full term prescribed by the Constitution and were not earlier dissolved during the first two decades of the functioning of the Constitution. This in turn was due to the fact that Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister at the Centre and the members of the Congress Party in various States, with rare exceptions, faced no real challenge. This has made many people believe that there is something abnormal or unnatural about a legislature being dissolved before its term has come to an end. Hence the peculiarly Indian term 'mid-term poll' which is not known in any other part of the democratic world. The fact is that any election that takes place is a General Election at whatever stage in the life of the previous parliament or legislature it may take place. It is worth mentioning that not a single newspaper nor a single Member of Parliament in Britain described either the February 1974 or October 1974 Parliamentary election in that country as a 'mid-term poll'.

The institution of dissolution has come to us from the practice of parliamentary democracy in Britain. In his classic work on the British Constitution, Dicey clinches the issue when he says about the right of the Crown to dissolve Parliament:

There are certainly combinations of circumstances under which the Crown has a right to dismiss a Ministry who command a parliamentary majority and to dissolve the Parliament by which the Ministry are supported.

The prerogative, in short, of a dissolution may be so employed as to override the will of the representative body, or, as it is popularly called, 'the People's House of Parliament'. This looks at first sight like saying that in certain cases the prerogative can be so used as to set at nought the will of the nation. But in reality

it is far otherwise. The discretionary power of the Crown occasionally, may be, and according to constitutional precedents sometimes ought to be, used to strip an existing House of Commons of its authority. But the reason why the House can, in accordance with the Constitution, be deprived of power and of existence is that an occasion has arisen in which there is a fair reason to suppose that the opinion of the House is not the opinion of the electors. A dissolution is in its essence an appeal from the legal to the political sovereign.

In a parliamentary system, the prerogative or right of the Crown or President or Head of the State to dissolve parliament is thus well understood. The Indian Constitution provides that the President of the Union and the Governor of a State are entitled at their discretion to dissolve their respective legislatures. Normally, this discretion is exercised by the Head of the State at the initiative of the Prime Minister or the Chief Minister, but there is nothing in the Constitution to prevent the President or a Governor from acting without reference to the wishes of the Prime Minister or the Chief Minister.

For this there are at least two well-known precedents. One was the dissolution of the Kerala State Assembly by the Governor of Kerala at the instance not of his own Chief Minister, Namboodiripad, who protested vigorously against this 'undemocratic' action, but at the instance of Indira Gandhi, the then Congress President. This move was supported by the Union Government of Prime Minister Nehru, and by many Members of Parliament like myself who upheld the President's Proclamation and the dissolution of the Kerala State Assembly in support of a popular revolt against the tyranny of the Communist minority which had exhausted its mandate and had forfeited the confidence of the people. That uprising, comparable to the one now led by Jayaprakash, was led by the veteran, Mannath Padmanabham, who was similarly acclaimed by the people of Kerala as their leader. The Central Parliamentary Board of the Congress in their Resolution protested the democratic character of this act in June 1959:

Taking note of the critical situation that had arisen in Kerala, the vast upsurge of public opinion against the State Government and frequent misuse by it of the coercive apparatus of the State, the

Committee formally resolved: 'In such circumstances, the democratic way of meeting the situation is to have general elections in the State for the Assembly. A government which is so challenged and which has to face this widespread and intense opposition would be well advised to accept that challenge and agree to fresh elections. Such a course of action would divert popular energy into proper democratic channels....Where there is a conflict of opinion, ways to resolve it should be found which are both peaceful and constitutional.'

Significantly, the Board's resolution made two other points. First, the Kerala situation was considered not only from the viewpoint of the Congress, but keeping the larger interest of the country and the democratic structure to which India was committed in mind. Second, it conceded that normally a government continues to function for the full period of five years as laid down in the Constitution, but it added that the Constitution itself had provided for a change to be made if a State Government fails to carry a majority in the Assembly and no other Government can be constituted. . . . It may however be that the government has a majority in the State Assembly but nevertheless is unable to function satisfactorily because of widespread opposition from the public.'

The other illustration of the Governor's right to go over the head of his own Chief Minister took place when that able civil servant and administrator, Dharma Vira, as the Governor of West Bengal, dismissed the C.P.(Marxist) Government, dissolved the Assembly and called for fresh elections in the sixties.

This whole issue has been distorted by the unfortunate fact that almost all the Governors in India have been nominees of the Congress Party and, with rare exceptions, have failed to use the discretion given to them under the Constitution independently of the Centre. If the Governors of States in India had been what they should have been, the point that Jayaprakash is making would have found much more ready acceptance.

Violation of Law

There are several critics who, while conceding the legality of the demand for the dissolution of the Bihar Legislative Assembly, take the line that such a demand should only be promoted by strictly

legal methods of agitation and that any violation of law in the nature of *satyagraha* or breach of prohibitory orders or police regulations is not permissible. This objection raises fundamental and philosophical issues.

Normally, a Liberal Democrat would not encourage or resort to a breach of law, but there is a qualification to this generalisation and that is that those making the laws represent the will of the people and that there is nothing in such laws that is oppressive or that violates the individual conscience. So, on the other extreme, the Liberal would justify the validity of a revolution when human liberties are destroyed by regimes which obviously oppress the people.

Jayaprakash has repeatedly explained that he himself was fully converted to the Bihar students' call for dismissal of the State Government and the dissolution of the State Assembly after the brutal police firings in Gaya and the refusal of the State Government and Assembly to respond to the plea for an independent enquiry. In other words, a government that has violated the civil liberties and the rights of the citizens is no longer entitled to demand explicit obedience of its laws.

On 15 February 1975, Jayaprakash, while addressing government employees in Delhi, warned them against the possibility of the Congress Government in Delhi doing what Sheikh Mujibur Rehman has done in Bangladesh, namely, paving the way to the establishment of a one party dictatorship, and urged them to see that this was not allowed to happen. He feared that by misusing the declaration of the State of Emergency which had been wrongly kept alive for several years, the Union Government might illegally seek to extend the life of the Lok Sabha after the expiry of its term next year. This, it may be recalled, is what has already happened in Ceylon. In a democracy those who do not leave the seat of power, despite the demand by the majority of the people as had happened in Bihar, should, Jayaprakash urged, be treated as 'traitors'. While the time has not yet come to give a call to the people to revolt against such leaders, government employees should refuse to obey such orders as were 'immoral' or 'wrong'.

The question of the legitimacy of the present Union Government and its right to alter the Constitution to the detriment of the citizen becomes relevant at this stage. It is well known that the present Union Government owes its mandate to forty-three per cent of the voters who cast their votes in the General Elections to

Parliament of March 1971. When it is recalled that those who voted constituted only fifty-four per cent of the electorate, one is led to the startling result that those who actually voted for the Congress Party now in office in Delhi represented only around twenty-four per cent of the entire electorate. Can a Government supported by only one in four voters of voting age claim a mandate not only to rule the country but to enact such flagrantly anti-people, anti-democratic Amendments to the Constitution as the 24th and 25th Amendments?

There may be more than one answer to this question, but Gandhiji's answer was clear. According to him even one individual citizen has the right to break a law and take the consequences if his inner voice or conscience tells him that the law is a lawless law and should not be accepted. There are two limitations to this right. One is the maintenance of non-violence and the other is the readiness to take the consequences of the act of *satyagraha* and not to run away. According to this Gandhian test, Jayaprakash and his followers cannot but be deemed to be true *satyagrahis*.

Indeed, even those who are in authority today came to power by resorting to the same methods during the struggle for national independence. If their present argument held good, not they but the British Viceroy would still be ruling India! •

The Revived Controversy

Doubts about some of J.P.'s activities do not appear to have been altogether stilled even in Sarvodaya circles. By the end of 1974, the controversy that had raged earlier between the two Sarvodaya leaders, Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan, and which had been settled as far back as July 1974, came to life again. An outsider might be forgiven for observing that the arguments between these two Sarvodaya leaders tend to be of a somewhat esoteric nature, such as those between Catholics and Protestants or between Stalinists and Trotskyists. Be that as it may, when the Prime Minister challenged Jayaprakash in November 1974 to test the wishes of the people of Bihar by waiting for the General Elections to the State Assembly, Jayaprakash felt compelled to accept the challenge. In the light of rumours and reports then prevalent about an impending dissolution of Parliament and the likelihood of simultaneous elections to the State Assembly in Bihar early in 1975, it was natural that he should discuss the matter more often than he might otherwise have done.

Acharya Vinoba Bhave has been reported as expressing his disquiet over J.P.'s undue interest in elections. It was pointed out, however, that neither Jayaprakash nor any member of the Sarvodaya movement proposes to stand for election either to Parliament or to the Bihar State Assembly. What they are engaged in is to promote the establishment of organs of people's power from the villages upwards so that, as and when the time comes, they may put up good men of the people's choice as candidates as distinct from those nominated by political parties. This is an endeavour at developing grassroots democracy at the village level and it would indeed appear to be strange to argue that this would be contrary to the principles of Gandhiji who also talked incessantly of 'Gram Swaraj' and the decentralisation of political and economic power.

Jayaprakash has been at pains to point out that he had explained in his speech on 18 November in Patna that the responsibility for dragging the issue of the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly and the resignation of the Ministry into the electoral arena lies squarely on Mrs. Gandhi's shoulders, and that he had no alternative but to accept her challenge. According to him, 'the issue to be decided at the elections, 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'.

Jayaprakash has pleaded that what is contemplated by him is more in the nature of a referendum than a normal election to a legislature. On 14 February 1975, he challenged those in authority to hold a referendum in Bihar to determine the extent of popular support for the demands for the dismissal of the State Government and the dissolution of the Assembly. He says:

For me the election is just another battleground for the people's and students' struggle, and the arena we have entered is not that of elections but of an 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 indentifying ourselves but with people struggling against a corrupt, oppressive and incompetent regime and an iniquitous social order.

Unfortunately, it was not possible for the majority in the

Sarva Seva Sangh supporting Jayaprakash to have its way when it met in a conference in Paunar in March 1975 because of the requirement of unanimity within that organisation. In the result, it was agreed that the organisation should remain in a state of suspended animation until Acharya Vinoba Bhave broke his silence, which is to last the rest of this year.

Dubious Company?

While Jayaprakash's plea carries conviction, the apprehension continues among some of his supporters of a real danger coming from too much involvement with political parties and electoral activities. The danger is of his being tarred with the multicoloured party brush and the Prime Minister had a point when, in an interview with the *New York Times* in February 1975, she said: 'Each (political party) thinks that through him they may get something which they have not got on their own.'

It is perhaps natural that leaders of the political parties concerned should seek to use Jayaprakash's moral prestige as an umbrella under which to shelter, but the question is to what extent Jayaprakash should allow this process to take place. It was thus a matter for relief when Jayaprakash publicly declined the honour of leadership of the Opposition parties offered to him by Charan Singh of the B.L.D. in Delhi on 25 November, since Jayaprakash has everything to lose and little to gain from too much proximity to these parties and their leaders.

The dangers of any such identification are obvious. First of all, what makes people rally round Jayaprakash throughout India is that he is a good man. If once he descends to the level of the politicians who have failed the people and democracy over the last two decades, he too would be devalued.

A more down to earth loss would be the fact that, by the very nature of his identification with Opposition parties, Jayaprakash would cease to be a national leader and, like the Prime Minister, become a factional one. Man to man, and left to themselves, members of the ruling Congress are, by and large, it may be claimed, no worse than members of the Opposition parties. Indeed, coming from the same homes and families they could hardly be very different. It is the possession of power that may corrupt them and make them appear much worse. Why then should Jayaprakash,

who enjoys the esteem and regard of a very large number of members of the party in power, make enemies of them and drive them to regard him as an opponent by lining up with Opposition parties in an electoral contest? Finally, can Jayaprakash afford to accept the assurances of good behaviour offered by the leaders of these political parties? Does their record justify this faith?

I once asked Jayaprakash whether he could really claim that there had been a change of heart and how he was going to protect himself from being tarred with the politicians' brush. I conceded that in Bihar he could handle this matter because he was very much the stronger factor but, outside Bihar, how did he propose to get the cooperation of the parties while at the same time not getting involved in their petty squabbles and differences? Jayaprakash replied:

Well, Minoo, I have answered this question in Delhi (in November) to the extent that it can be answered at this stage. If the movement in the rest of the States is started by political parties, it is bound to fail. Therefore I have been saying that there must be a people's movement also. The students and non-party people must come forward and the political parties might form a part of it. As a matter of fact, if elections take place, there is nothing to replace them except a people's candidate in some constituencies where the organisation and the movement are very strong. There people's candidates might be set up. The Struggle Committees might set up their own candidates and not accept any party candidate. Therefore, for the rest of the country I do not know if there is much chance of a movement being developed by the political parties joining hands together. If they cannot adjust themselves, they must form part of the movement that has started.

The Non-Playing Captain

A diametrically opposite criticism levelled against Jayaprakash is that he tends to fight shy of the problem of power and that, while he seeks to destroy what there is, he is not prepared to take responsibility and offer himself as an alternative either in Patna or in New Delhi. He has been described by a British journalist rather pictur-esque as a 'non-playing captain'. I asked J.P. how, if he won the elections in Bihar, about which I had little doubt, he would avoid

becoming the *de facto* leader of the party that came into power or the king-maker or the man who nominates the Chief Minister. How would this fit in with his opposition to the establishment of yet another political party? Jayaprakash conceded that the majority in the new Bihar State Assembly would be made up of candidates endorsed by him, since every Opposition candidate would be endorsed by him. At this, I asked who would nominate the Chief Minister. 'Well', said Jayaprakash, 'I will teach them democracy then. They must sit down and do so by consensus and, if there is no consensus, by the Single Transferable Vote or by some other method. I am not going to nominate any Chief Minister.'

I insisted that he would be responsible for the man even if this happened and Jayaprakash agreed that he would be responsible. At this point, I asked him to consider the possibility that, human frailties being what they are, his men might start showing weaknesses and might let him down. Jayaprakash's answer to this was: 'The movement will be carried on outside. The pressure will be on. It may be dissociation or it may be a confrontation with them also. I am not committed to any political party.'

Too Vague?

Jayaprakash's appeal has elicited response from a wide variety of people belonging to all creeds and castes and from every walk of life. It is natural that this should be so because his campaign is nothing if not national. At the same time, this creates certain problems. Jayaprakash's appeal cannot be as clear-cut as would be that of a leader of a political party who appeals only to the like-minded. It is something in the nature of a national crusade and it suffers from the diffusiveness of an appeal of such a crusade. It is often said of Gandhiji that 'he was all things to all men'. A similar charge of vagueness in regard to J.P.'s objectives and programme is made in certain quarters and, on 29 January 1975, Chief Minister Ghafoor plaintively complained that Jayaprakash did not stick to anything for twenty-four hours at a time and kept shifting his stand.

I have been among those who have drawn J.P.'s attention to the danger that comes from the lack of an articulate and concrete socio-economic programme. Thus, when I met him in Varanasi on 25 December 1974, I led up to this question by asking him whether he recognised that the magnitude and scale of corruption prevalent

in India was of a broad economic nature and not of the venal kind such as that of a policeman on point duty or a railway clerk in a booking office. Added to this normal frailty was the temptation that stemmed from 'permit licence raj' or Statism in which the politician and the bureaucrat, both rather poor, enjoyed the power of economic life and death over much more affluent people. This creates a situation where corruption becomes endemic. To put it another way, the smuggler, the blackmarketeer and the tax-evader are the creations of the Government's economic policies which run contrary to human nature and to the laws of economics. When a man is denied a fair profit, he chooses to operate underground as does the *tolkachi* (spiv) in the Soviet Union, despite the shooting squad, fifty years after the revolution. My question to Jayaprakash was: 'Why do you not point out clearly in your speeches and articles that the source of corruption is Statism?'

Jayaprakash's reply, which was quite frank, was: 'I quite agree with you.' He went on to add:

Because we function in a scarcity economy, some sort of public distribution system, some sort of control of prices, all that has to come. But for that the administration and political leadership must be more honest than we have. They are not. This is a very dangerous thing and this is something that the Opposition parties must also be careful about, because I don't think normally they would be very superior. I hope they are. But the temptation of doing these things is very great. So I must say 'no' to a completely free economy without any permits. I am for minimum controls and well-devised controls well thought out. I think the bureaucracy and the corrupt politicians are both hand in glove. They want these kinds of control, which have completely failed, to continue for their benefit and not for the benefit of the country, I am sure, or the consumer, for instance. . . . If small people put their hands to it, I suppose we will have a better system. . . .

At this I asked Jayaprakash whether he stood by an earlier statement of his made some years ago that the 'Welfare State' creates a 'creeping paralysis'.

'It does', Jayaprakash replied. 'I like the Sarvodaya idea, Gandhi's idea, that "that government is best which governs the least". I would like people more and more to look after themselves

rather than to look to the State.'

I pressed J.P. further by saying that my earlier question had not been asked because of any abstract considerations but the danger that some people saw that, in the absence of a clear-cut economic posture, if a chaotic situation were to develop when he might not be there to control it, the fruits of this agitation might well drop into the lap of the Naxalites and the Marxist Communists, who profess a certain measure of sympathy for him, rather than into the hands of Liberal Democrats or Social Democrats, as he would presumably prefer.

'There is no foolproof guarantee against that', Jayaprakash said in reply. 'These are the risks of a movement of this kind. These risks have to be taken. The Russian Revolution could very well have taken a more healthy line.'

When I asked Jayaprakash whether he would not reject the C.P.(M) support on the ground that, till they gave up their dogma, they could not really be legitimate allies in the fight for a free society, Jayaprakash demurred and said: 'I don't think so because I hope there is enough real dedication in them to the cause of the people rather than a commitment to theoretical ideology to change and to learn. That is well worth trying.'

These misgivings notwithstanding, I myself am not sure that Jayaprakash would be wise to commit himself to a cut-and-dry socio-economic programme. He is not in government nor is he offering himself as the leader of an alternative government ready to take over the reigns of office. He is on a moral crusade attempting a total revolution in the minds and lives of the people and at this stage it would perhaps be a pity if he were to limit his appeal to certain sections of society and repel others by outlining a programme of the nature that various political parties have evolved.

Mao and Lenin

The position, however, is quite different when it comes to certain remarks of Jayaprakash appearing in the press reportedly lauding Mao Tse-tung and Lenin. On more than one occasion, Jayaprakash is reported to have made what appeared to be appreciative references to Mao's achievements in China. When I put this to Jayaprakash during a visit to Patna in February 1975, he explained that he had been misquoted by the press and that what he had said was

that, if he were driven to a choice between Communist China and Soviet Russia, he would prefer the former because, while the Soviet regime had degenerated and become fossilised, the Mao regime had not lost all its dynamism. I could not desist from asking Jayaprakash who had driven him to this choice between the two communist powers. I also reminded him that one of the finest things about Gandhiji was what Louis Fischer in his book, *The Great Challenge*, describes as 'double rejection'—a refusal to choose between two evils and being driven to the choice of 'the lesser evil'.

Insofar as his references to Lenin were concerned, J.P. said that the context in which he had sometimes mentioned Lenin in his public utterances was concerning the point he was making in regard to electoral and parliamentary politics. In that regard he had mentioned that the two men by whom he had been successively influenced, namely, Lenin and then Gandhi, had both a common attitude on this particular point illustrated by Lenin's coolness to participation in the *Duma*, the Russian Parliament set up by the Czar from 1906 onwards, and Gandhiji's attitude towards the British sponsored legislatures in the twenties and the thirties. The question arises whether, when referring to this point, J.P. should not also draw attention to the much more fundamental conflicts and disagreements between the two men. Is it not now too late in history for anyone to repudiate Stalin and cling to Lenin? It was Lenin who imported into Marxism both character assassination and physical liquidation. It was Lenin who had, after seizing power by force, dissolved at the point of a bayonet the newly elected Constituent Assembly. According to Solzhenitsyn, who ought to know, it was Lenin who had first established slave labour camps.

Prime Minister's Options

If the agitation led by Jayaprakash grows and the decline in the Prime Minister's popularity recorded in the recent polls organised by the Gallup affiliate in this country, the Indian Institute of Public Opinion, continues, there is little doubt that a new balance of forces will develop in this country. The question then arises as to how the situation may be expected to resolve itself. There appear to be a variety of ways in which this question may be answered and more than one scenario is possible.

The first of these is a confrontation and a clash *a outrance*.

The dangers of a fight to the finish are fairly clear. On the popular side the forces of revolution might get out of hand leading to violence and the distortion of the aims of the movement. This would be a tragedy. Whatever happened, Jayaprakash and what he stands for would be defeated.

On the other side, the picture may be even uglier. An outright victory may only be possible for those in office by a seizure of power and the establishment of a dictatorship, accompanied perhaps by more brutal repression than anything British rule had perpetrated in this country.

Recent developments in Bangladesh may in that event prove to be a portent. This unfortunately is not a fanciful fear. Uma Vasudev, in her adulatory biography of the Prime Minister entitled *Revolution in Restraint*, writes: 'In the early 1950's Mrs. Gandhi explicitly stated that in order to make the country strong, remove poverty and eradicate illiteracy, it would be better not to have any opposition parties.' Her biographer's later attempt to explain this away by quoting Mrs. Gandhi's professed dedication to democracy in no way weakens the force of her admission which could have been documented by Mrs. Gandhi's remarks during a visit to Kenya in the fifties when she expressed the view so well summarised by her biographer. This provoked Mr. Ngala, the then leader of the Opposition Party named K.A.D.U., to suggest that she could practice her one party idea in her own country but that Kenya preferred the British two party model.

Any hope that the Prime Minister may have changed her views on this point in the intervening years is unfortunately dashed by what she told the *New York Times* correspondent in Delhi early in February 1975 as reported in the *Indian Express* of 14 February 1975. When the correspondent pointed out that there was no real opposition in India, the Prime Minister replied that 'it was so because they had to do the basic things and there were not many paths to choose from when they were doing the basic things. Perhaps that is why', she went on to observe, 'so many countries have given up democracy because at that stage you have to lay the foundations of the country. Once the foundation is built, you can, for instance, quarrel about the decoration, and so on and so forth later. But if you don't have the foundation, nothing can happen afterwards.'

In the event of developments of that nature, the genuine Congressman with his roots in the struggle for Independence and his

allegiance to Gandhiji might be swept aside and the Communists and their fellow-travellers seize power. A dictatorship would not only mean the end of a free society but may also mean the loss of national freedom gained only a quarter of a century ago. The relatively mild foreign rule of democratic Britain may then be replaced by a ruthless totalitarian rule being imposed by the men in the Kremlin through their stooges in this country. It is therefore not surprising that voices have been raised from within the Congress Party showing a growing awareness of these ugly possibilities. The willingness of Mohan Dharia, a Minister of State in the Union Government, to sacrifice his official position for the sake of asserting his right to call for a dialogue between his Party and Jayaprakash and the healthy response his action elicited from his colleagues in the Congress Party and others, is an encouraging portent in this connection. It is to be hoped that the love of freedom, both national and democratic, of the members of the Congress Party will succeed in asserting itself to the point where the leadership of the Party changes its policies or is replaced.

If this does not happen, then only an adjustment between the Prime Minister and Jayaprakash Narayan may provide the way out. Fortunately, a solution of this nature is made easier by the fact that, despite all the current talk of 'fascism', the rule of law, by and large, still prevails and a dialogue is possible. It was the acceptance of certain inhibitions by both the British in India and Mahatma Gandhi that made a peaceful transfer of power possible. The maintenance of the present restraint on both sides should make sharing of power not too difficult. In this context, it is a pity that terms like fascism should be bandied about. It is, of course, idiotic to describe Jayaprakash as a fascist and nobody who knows the meaning of the word, except of course the communists who habitually hurl it at their opponents all over the globe, would use it. On the other hand, can one call the Prime Minister and her government fascist? If they really were, would Jayaprakash be alive and functioning, would the great march in Delhi of 6 March have passed off so peacefully and successfully, and would not a great deal in India be different from what it is?

Another helpful factor is that the attempt at revolution is a peaceful one and there is little bitterness and no call for blood on the side of those in revolt despite the death of more than a hundred young men in Bihar.

Perhaps the most important positive factor that can make for adjustment is that, for a rarity, the leader of the revolutionary forces has no desire to take over the leadership of the government. Thus there is no question of displacement of the one by the other nor a transfer of power, but a sharing of power, with the younger of the two personalities executing the policies of the Government and the older one influencing and guiding them.

Jayaprakash had said a few months ago, when asked, that he was ready to state his position and had suggested conditions under which a *detente* would be possible. His proposals evoked no response. Indeed, at a public meeting at Shivaji Park in Bombay on 26 January 1975, he pointed out that it was not he who had created the confrontation but the Prime Minister when she needlessly announced after her talk with him that she would rather resign as Prime Minister than agree to the dissolution of the State Assembly. Jayaprakash asked why she should have blown up a demand of a local nature into such a big issue. In that speech Jayaprakash also recalled how Gandhiji had never thought conflict to be essential or inevitable. Even when faced by foreign rule he had urged that by constructive work, along with non-cooperation, the need for conflict could be avoided.

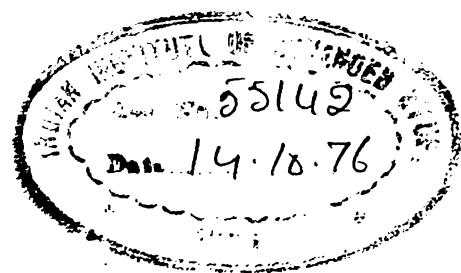
For the Prime Minister, the choice should not really be a difficult one. Is she not astute enough to know what happens to those who come to power, like Benes, Mazaryk and Dubcek, with the help of the communists? Neither communist dogma nor practice tolerates deviationists for long. When they have served their purpose they are destroyed.

Not very dissimilar has been the fate of those who have tried by means of demagogery to establish an authoritarian regime in the countries of Asia and Africa. As far back as 25 July 1969, while opposing in the Lok Sabha the introduction of a Bill to take the place of the Ordinance nationalising the larger banks, I had warned the Prime Minister to desist from following the example of Dr. Sukarno of Indonesia and Dr. Nkrumah of Ghana. 'Today it seems to me', I had said, 'that she is trying to tread that path. I want to ask her where are those tinpot dictators today? Where is Dr. Nkrumah and where is Dr. Sukarno? Let her beware that, if she goes on that path, she will come to the same end.'

Would not then sharing power with Jayaprakash, a comrade in the struggle for Independence and a friend of her father's, be a

much more attractive alternative, whether from the national or personal point of view? Of course it would mean the end of absolute power. Of course it would mean not being surrounded any longer by stooges and flatterers. Of course it would mean the end of tolerating corrupt colleagues. Of course it would mean a parting of ways with the communists. Most revolutions exact from those in power a much higher price than this. In return there would be the reward of popular affection in place of bitterness and comradeship in place of confrontation.

In the course of a conversation with an Italian journalist, Oriana Falacchi, some time at the end of 1971, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is reported to have said in answer to a question: 'All I want to do is a good job until I am no longer able. The day I am no longer able, I will give up before they make me give up.' It would be in the spirit of that sapient remark if Indira Gandhi were to invite Jayaprakash's guidance and advice in solving the country's problems and join with him in a campaign for creating a more prosperous, healthier and happier India.



J.P.'s call for a 'total revolution' has fired the imagination of millions of our countrymen. At the same time, it has led to much questioning and many doubts. No apologia, this book critically evaluates the campaign and clarifies many an issue so as to help the discerning reader to answer the question which so many men and women are asking : 'Is J.P. the answer?' J.P.'s own replies to the doubts and difficulties posed by the author are a unique feature of this book.

Starting with the infamous 'Battle of Patna' of 4 November 1974, this absorbing book flashes back to the beginnings of J.P.'s forty odd years of public service. It shows the way in which J.P.'s ideas developed all the way from Marxism through Democratic Socialism to Sarvodaya. No one is as well placed to tell this story as Minoo Masani, who draws on his rich knowledge of J.P.'s relations with Gandhiji and his life in prison and underground, as also on his close relationship, personal conversations and correspondence with J.P. stretching over many years.

The book concludes with a fascinating discussion of the options that J.P.'s agitation presents to the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and the implications for the future of India.

Politician, management consultant and author of that little classic, *Our India*, Minoo Masani has garnered wide experience in varied fields, whether as Member of Parliament, Mayor of Bombay, Ambassador to Brazil, or Patron of the Liberal International.

Jayaprakash and he were co-secretaries of the Congress Socialist Party, which they jointly established in 1934. After a year spent together in Nasik Road Cen^{tre} they parted company in 1939 on ideological differences. They have remained close friends throughout. From Socialism: J.P. to Sarvodaya, 1

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