

LIFE OR DEATH :

The Freedom to Choose

M. R. MASANI

Professor Milton Friedman and Mrs Friedman have just published their latest book entitled *Freedom To Choose*. The question arises whether the freedom to choose one's job, one's home, one's wife and the number of one's children is to be accompanied by the freedom, in certain circumstances, to choose between life and death.

On 8th December, 1980, a well known citizen of Poona, Mr. Gopal Mandlik, ended his life at the age of eighty-five, since he wished to die with dignity and decency. For the past two years he had corresponded with the Prime Minister arguing that an individual has the right to terminate his life when it is no longer worth living and requesting the Prime Minister to introduce a Bill in Parliament to permit people of his age and condition to terminate their lives in a legal manner.

After waiting for a couple of years for a response from Government, Mr. Mandlik decided to break the law and ended his life after saying that he knew it was illegal but that it was the right thing to do. He was a 'Satyagrahi' acting on Gandhiji's principle that any individual citizen who thinks a law to be immoral should break it and take the consequences.

By an interesting coincidence, on the same day a well-known neurologist, Dr. Ritchie Russel, electrocuted himself at the age of seventy-seven in his Oxford home in England for the same reason, that he did not think life was worth living anymore.

These are not isolated cases. In our own experience, we know of many unfortunate people among our relations and friends who have led a most miserable

existence for years, either as paralysed people or those who have become vegetables, or who have become a burden to themselves and their families.

One of the saddest cases was that of Norman Thomas, the great American socialist, whom I had the privilege of knowing and who had a whole lifetime of service to his people behind him. At a very advanced age, he was struck down by a stroke which paralysed him from the neck downwards. Only his mind and his speech remained. He lay in bed for a whole decade pleading with his doctors to let him go. Unfortunately, in that particular State of the United States, voluntary euthanasia was not legal and he was tormented in this cruel manner for a whole decade.

The legal position varies from country to country. In Scotland, committing suicide and abetting suicide are both legal. In England committing suicide is legal but abetting suicide is illegal. In India both attempting suicide and abetting suicide are illegal. In some States of the United States terminating one's life is illegal, in others it is not. Can it be that an act of this nature is moral on one side of a boundary and immoral on the other side? Can it be right to do in Scotland what one cannot do in England and right to do in England what one cannot do in India? Or is the taboo purely a conventional one?

This is not only an off-beat subject but a very controversial one, and so far it has hardly been mentioned or discussed publicly in India. I remember reading only one brave article by the late Dr. Rusi Vakil, the well-known cardiologist, supporting voluntary euthanasia. In the rest of the world, however, it is a matter of live controversy, and in many countries there are organisations formed for the purpose of upholding the concept of a man having the right to choose to live or to die with dignity.

There is an international organisation in California called "Hemlock", the poison that Socrates took in ancient Greece. There are branches of this organisation in England, Scotland, Australia, Canada, New

Zealand, France, Germany, Holland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, South Africa and Japan.

In Britain there is a Society called EXIT which has been the subject of considerable controversy in the press. Last year they decided to publish a book which has a preface by my good friend, Arthur Koestler, the eminent writer, in the course of which he observes:

"We need midwives to aid us to be unborn — or at least the assurance that such aid is available. Euthanasia, like obstetrics, is the natural corrective to a biological handicap. . . . As the progress towards legalisation will be slow, a matter of years or even decades, the publication of a practical guide to "auto-euthanasia" will, we hope, bring peace of mind to many who would otherwise despair. There is only one prospect worse than being chained to an intolerable existence: the nightmare of a botched attempt to end it. I know that I am speaking in the name of many (some of them personal friends) who tried and failed — or who don't dare to try for fear of failure."

The text of the proposed book makes it very clear that there is no desire to encourage people to commit suicide. On the contrary, there is a chapter entitled "Why You Should Think Again" before taking such a step.

As it happens, however, the book has an appendix which guides a man or woman on how to die in peace and without pain. EXIT have been threatened with the risk of prosecution but they have decided to face the danger rather than abandon their right to educate their members on the subject.

I personally believe that the right to die is a fundamental human right alongside of the right to live. If, as the poet wrote, Man is indeed "the Master of his Fate and the Captain of his Soul", it cannot be that the freedom to choose how and when to depart can be denied to him.

Lawyers sometimes argue that every right involves the right to its opposite — that the right to associate involves the right not to do so and the right to speak involves the right to silence. By that logic, the right to live should involve the right to die.

There is at present a Private Member's Bill before the Lok Sabha on "Mercy Killing" proposed by Mr. Mulchand Daga, Congress (I) M.P. from Rajasthan, but there is no public opinion or awareness on the issue to support it.

The subject is a very complicated one and there is no point in over-simplifying it. For instance, there is the desire of a man having a sound mind to put an end to his own life. There is the desire of relations who love someone else in pain and agony to respond to the beloved one's plea to be allowed to go. There is, finally, the case of someone who is not in his right mind, who is in a coma or who has become a vegetable, like the girl in the Quinlan Case in the

United States. Finally there is the problem of the doctor.

A most eminent medical man, Dr. Christian Bernard, has recently written a book entitled "A Good Life, a Good Death" in which he says that he has practiced passive euthanasia all his life. He has withdrawn treatment in appropriate cases but he has not practiced active euthanasia or put anyone to sleep, because that is illegal. He suggests that the law should be changed. He goes on to say that he and his brother have entered into a death pact under which each brother will relieve the other from his agony, when called on to do so.

There are obvious dangers of euthanasia being misused by unscrupulous relations to get rid of somebody for their own benefit. That is why limitations have to be imposed on the right to die, as there are limitations on all other fundamental rights in our Constitution. This may involve the participation of doctors and judges. We are not at this moment concerned with specific changes in the law, but the time has come to deal with this matter and to discuss it freely and frankly.

At the root of this controversy lies a philosophical issue. Is all life sacred? Or is it only the good life, as the ancient Greeks called it, which is sacrosanct? There are those who believe that all life is sacred and that no one has the right to take his own or anyone else's life in any circumstances. Such people of course should be like the Jains. They should logically abstain from killing cockroaches, bugs and poisonous snakes, or a man who is raping a woman.

The right of self-defence which is now open to an Indian citizen who himself or herself is being murdered should also be withdrawn. Finally, such people should be prepared to see their country overrun by outside aggressors without armed resistance.

It is significant that Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, did not take such a position. There is the well-known instance where he put a calf in his *ashram* to sleep rather than let it endure endless pain and suffering.

It is also on record, that when Hitler and Stalin combined to attack little Poland, gallant then as now, in 1939, and the Polish army and people resisted with arms, Mahatma Gandhi described their armed resistance against heavy odds to be non-violent and therefore meritorious.

An article I recently wrote for the *Statesman* on this subject on 5th April has resulted in my receiving more than a hundred letters from readers of that paper, mostly in and around Calcutta, lending their support and offering to join in establishing in India a Society for the Right to Die with Dignity.

I would very much appreciate readers of *FREE-DOM FIRST* who are interested in it if write to me at Breach Candy House, Bhulabhai Desai Road, Bombay - 400 026, so that I may be able to contact them in this connection.

Brezhnev's New Suggestion

ANITA SETHI

In his speech before the 26th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Brezhnev made a significant proposal. He maintained that withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan would become easier if his proposals about the Persian Gulf were accepted.

This suggestion created interesting reactions in India. Shri Narasimha Rao recommended it as the correct approach to the Afghan issue during his speech in the Lok Sabha in replying to the debate on grants for his Ministry.

The geo-political importance of the Persian Gulf region should not be minimised. He who controls the region, controls the world. In this region today runs the life-line of the economy of most of the countries of the globe. Moscow has been long dreaming of establishing its global hegemony. Nothing would serve better the achievement of this goal than sovereignty over the Gulf waters. Since the road to such a sovereignty lies through Iran, it would be worthwhile to recapitulate Soviet-Iran relations since the October Revolution of 1917.

Twice since 1917 Soviet troops have invaded Iran and established at Gilan in the northern region of the country an independent Soviet Republic of Azarbaijan. Twice they have had to vacate their aggression on account of threats from Western troops standing close by. Brezhnev's recent proposal on the Persian Gulf aims to obviate any future set back of this kind to Soviet aggression on Iran.

The quintessence of these proposals is to keep Western troops away from the Gulf region so that the Soviets are able to overrun Iran from the North without difficulty, where they have already concentrated thirty divisions of their troops. And in near-by Turkistan, the size of Soviet armed concentration is as much as on the Sino-Soviet border.

In 1934 November, Molotov was instructed to make it clear to Hitler that the centre of gravity of Soviet interests lay South in the region of the Persian Gulf. This implies that, in the Second World War, the Soviets wanted to seek the connivance of Fascist Germany to swallow Iran, as they did in the case of Poland.

In November 1979, the Soviets demanded from Hafiz Ullah Amin Kabul exclusive use of Shinbad airport, situated on Iran's border in Afghanistan. Amin refused, and Soviet troops occupied Afghanistan. Now the size of Soviet troops concentrated at Shinbad is much more than the requirements of local anti-insurgency measures. Shinbad is within 90 minutes flying time to the Persian Gulf.

Iran has twice denounced Articles 5 and 6 of the Treaty of Friendship between Iran and the Soviet Union. Signed in Moscow on February 25, 1921, Arti-

cles 5 and 6 confer on the Soviet Union the right to intervene in Iran. This right is to be exercised at the sole discretion of the USSR.

According to the articles of this treaty, if a third party should attempt to carry out a policy of usurpation by means of armed intervention in Persia, or if such power should desire to use Persian territory as a base of operation against Russia, and if the Persian Government is not able to put a stop to such a menace after once having been called upon to do so by Russia, she shall have the right to advance her troops into the Persian interior for carrying out military operations necessary for its defence.

Twice, Tehran has notified Russia that it regards Articles 5 and 6 of their treaty as invalid, first in 1930 and then in 1975. Nonetheless, the Soviets continue to ignore the denunciation, and insistently proclaim the continuing validity and political relevance of the Treaty.

One such claim was made as recently as February 27 this year on Radio Moscow. Close to Iran's northern borders, on Soviet soil, there runs a radio station called National Voice of Iran, which daily threatens Iran's leaders with dire consequences if they fail to follow the line of the Soviet-backed Iranian Communists (Tudeh).

Thus the sum and substance of Brezhnev's suggestion is that the West should withdraw from the Persian Gulf. Then the Soviets would favourably consider the withdrawal of their troops from Afghanistan, so that it becomes easier for them to reach the Gulf waters through Iran. This would cut the life lines of the West, make it bend on its knees and acquiesce in the Soviet objective of global hegemony.

It is surprising that this suggestion of Brezhnev has been warmly welcomed by our Ministry of External Affairs.

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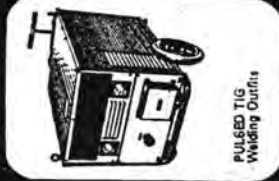
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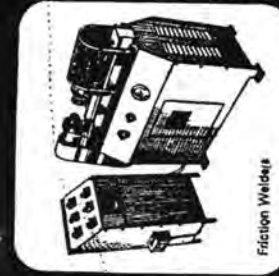
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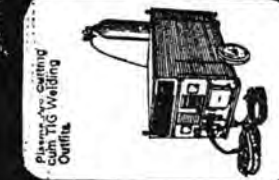
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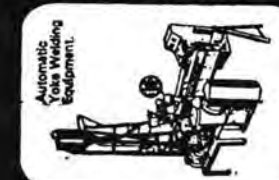
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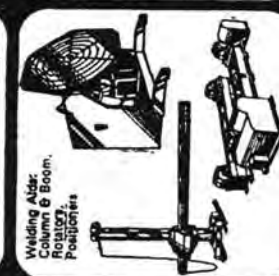
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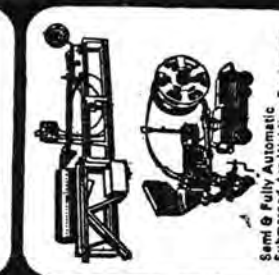
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Parliamentary Democracy or Presidential Dictatorship?

P. M. KAMATH

After 33 years of parliamentary government in India, certain people have now begun a discussion on the form of government best suited to the Indian genius. Contemporary advocates of Presidential government are very wise people. Some of them, like the Congress(I) Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Mr. Antulay, have the influence to get the country moving in that direction. He has been the most vociferous champion of a Presidential form of government for India.

Mr Antulay cannot be taken lightly, for two reasons. Firstly, during the Emergency, a draft on Presidential government for India was prepared. No one was certain about its authorship. Mr Antulay himself has admitted now that he was the brain behind it. Secondly, as a man who stood firmly with Mrs Gandhi during her days without power, he enjoys her full confidence.

Mr Antulay's confidence is reflected in his statement that when he supported Mrs Gandhi he belonged to a minority. Now his party has become a majority. Similarly, he may be amongst a minority, supporting Presidential government for India, but soon he may become a part of the majority on that issue too.

Why do Mr Antulay and others demand a change to the Presidential system? First and the foremost ground is that the government in the Parliamentary system does not enjoy a fixed term of office. In the Presidential system — whether American, French, Sri Lanka, or Philippines type — the Executive once elected continues in office for a fixed term. Parliamentary governments in the Indian states have been perennially troubled by political defections.

Especially, *Aya Rams* and *Gaya Rams* made a lot of money during the period between 1967 and 1971. For the first time a Central government was toppled by defections in July 1979. The result was a period of political instability, non-government under a government appointed by the President. That is all recent history.

Undoubtedly, the Presidential system provides for a fixed term of office. But the American system creates situations where the President cannot be removed even when he is unable to govern. President Wilson soon after his return from Paris in 1919 was paralysed and could not exercise his powers: yet he continued to be the Chief Executive till the next election in 1921. During the entire period his wife really ruled the US.

In recent times, Nixon's Watergate Scandal is another example when the Presidency was completely paralysed for nearly two years before Nixon resigned in August 1974. His White House Chief of Staff, Mr. Alexander Haig, managed the Presidency.

In a parliamentary system under such circumstances the majority party can easily replace their leader

without paralysing the government. The best examples are those of the Conservative Party replacing Baldwin by Churchill in 1940 and Harold Macmillan replacing Anthony Eden in 1956.

Secondly, the advocates of the Presidential system are fascinated by the possibility of appointing talented people to the government. A notable spokesman for this is Mr. Palkhivala who, along with Mr. J.R.D. Tata, has been for long a champion of the Presidential System.

True, in the American system, the President can appoint any competent person to a position of power in the government. Often, the Presidents have gone outside their party in search of talent.

President Kennedy appointed Robert McNamara as the Defence Secretary and Douglas Dillon as the Secretary of the Treasury — both were Republicans. Ronald Reagan has appointed Mrs. Kirkpatrick as the US Ambassador to the UN with a cabinet rank; she is a Democrat.

This is, however, only a part of the truth. While choosing talent from outside their own party, the President sees that candidates appointed have close ideological affinity with him.

In the US, the labels of Liberal and Conservative are more important than the party labels of Democrat and Republican. Hence, Kennedy, a liberal, appointed liberal Republicans in his government, and Republican Reagan, who is a conservative, appointed a conservative Democrat. It is inconceivable to have *vice-a-versa* appointments.

Presidents like Prime Ministers are also restrained in their choice by factors like regionalism, ethnicity or loyalty. No appointment is made entirely on the consideration of talent.

The recent appointment of Judge Clark as the Deputy Secretary of State illustrates this point. As the second highest official in charge of foreign affairs, he is expected to have at least a working knowledge of foreign affairs. Actually, in foreign affairs, he did not possess the knowledge of the well-informed common man. As *Newsweek* described it, he had a perfectly open mind in foreign affairs!

Nothing in the parliamentary system prevents the Prime Minister from inducting talent in her cabinet. Mr. Nehru had men like John Mathai, C. D. Deshmukh and M. C. Chagla in the Cabinet who were later made members of Parliament.

In Maharashtra, similarly, some years ago S. G. Barve, an ICS officer, was appointed as the Minister of Industries.

If our Prime Minister desires it, she can take any one in the Cabinet and get him or her elected later to Parliament. But with Mrs. Gandhi, the most important criterion in offering a berth in the cabinet has been total loyalty. It is rarely that total loyalty and talent go together.

The third reason that is advanced by Mr. Antulay is that in the Indian system the judiciary is too powerful, and that it frustrates government's measures meant to help the poor. As a matter of fact, he has said that ours is neither a Parliamentary nor a Presidential system but a Judicial Dictatorship.

Anywhere in the world, it is possible to have either an Executive Dictatorship or a Legislative Dictatorship. It is impossible to imagine a judicial dictatorship. The Judiciary has neither the money power possessed by the legislature nor the coercive power possessed by the Executive.

Has the Indian judiciary really been a road-block in the past or is it one at present, for governments adopting social welfare measures? Recently, in reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, the Law Minister gave some very interesting statistics. He said that between 1950 and 1980, the Indian Parliament passed 1977 Acts of which the Courts invalidated only 22.

This only shows that those who find fault with the Parliamentary system in India do so only to cover their own failures. Having promised a government that works, the ruling party possibly finds itself in a quandary. In spite of its "stability", the government has not been able to perform well. Loyalists have not been able to deliver the goods.

Can the Presidential system of the US type perform better? American Presidency has a duality within it. Its performance is extremely slow in domestic affairs because of Congressional control. So, in spite of the fact that the same party was in control, Mr. Carter was unable to get many of his policies approved by the Congress. His Energy Legislation, for instance, was declared by him as a "moral equivalent of war". Yet it was delayed for over three years and, when ultimately passed, it was in a most diluted manner, thus defeating the very purpose of the bill.

On the other hand, given a favourable domestic and international environment, the President can become almost dictatorial in foreign affairs. This was true of successive Presidents in the post-World War II period until Nixon. He can order troops into a foreign country, conduct secret wars, and control numerous domestic activities in the name of national security.

In general, the American Presidency has a tendency to move between two extremes: either it is extremely powerful or it is extremely incompetent. A

notable recent case is that of Mr. Carter, who was elected by the people as a reaction to the powerful Nixon Presidency. He proved to be in practice a weak President.

The Presidential system in the US is undoubtedly democratic. The political process has, as a matter of fact, a little too much of democracy. It succeeded in the US because of peculiar circumstances, which cannot be transplanted elsewhere. Several Latin American countries which imitated the American system invariably ended up as Dictatorships.

Can it succeed here? The chances are it might lead to individual dictatorship.

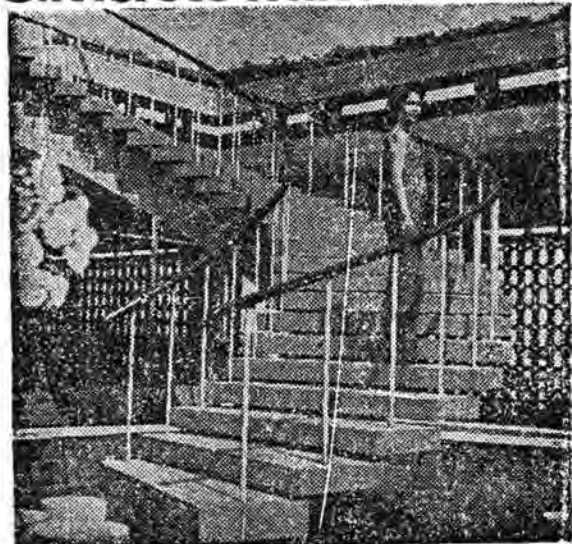
What attracts the advocates of the Presidential system is its concentration of powers in a single individual. In the absence of proper checks and balances, the political culture of debate, civic and economic freedoms, the dangers of its developing into an authoritarian system seem to be great. And the democratic credentials of its advocates are in doubt.

It is this fact that has made Mr. Palkhivala, a supporter of the Presidential system, argue that the time is not opportune for a change-over.

This does not mean that everything is fine with the present system of government. But before it is rejected as unworkable, it should and can be reformed.

In the ultimate analysis, the system of government is only an instrument of governance. That by itself cannot assure democratic government; it depends upon the political character and culture of the people.

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Tribal Traditions

The recent four-day Mahotsava of Tribal Arts, held at Ahwa in the Dangs, conclusively proved the basic uselessness inherent in such enterprises. Though it was organised and sponsored by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, and the Research Centre for the Performing Arts, Indian National Theatre, institutions one expected to have thoroughly done their homework in this area, it failed to generate any pragmatic resolutions to the problems of the Dangis and the preservation of their traditions.

The Seminar held in the mornings hardly had any authoritative speakers who had worked in this region and studied its problems. Instead of taking an impartial view of the Dangi situation, questions examining what kind of help could be given to them, and whether they require and desire any help in the first place, were calmly pushed aside to accommodate the airing of mofussil opinions by the intellectuals and experts who had gathered there. As a result, impractical suggestions had a magnificent opportunity to blossom forth.

One example of this was a suggestion made in all sincerity that textbooks for Dangi children should not be in Gujarati or Marathi, but only in their mother-tongue (of which, again, there are several dialects). Another speaker insisted that Dangi archery and fishing are examples of their Performing Arts. In that case, even the way they wash clothes should be considered a performing art!

At one stage, the discussions outside the Seminar room actually degenerated into purely selfish and petty Marathi-Gujarati linguistic and cultural conflicts. Inane comments were heard frequently at the performances held in the evenings: this is not 100% Dangi, or that is an example of typical Marathi influence, or something else is commercial and filmy. But no attempt was made to find out why this was so.

How is it that their art showed a distinct commercial streak? What exactly does preserving their culture mean? Is it fair to protect them from all outside influences and shut them up in museums in the holy name of "preservation"? Is such a superficially emotional and romantic attitude towards these people justified?

How many of the elite experts at the Mahotsava, propagating such views were truly and purely **Hindustani**? How many of them sent their children to English medium schools, thus learning English and forgetting their own culture?

Moreover, the Seminar revealed a superb paradox. On the one hand, we had the Forest authorities (one of the organising bodies was also the Department of Forests, Government of Gujarat) insisting that they had plenty of money to pour into the development of Dangs, whereas the promoters of the Tribal Arts claimed that "development" was not easy, since they did not have the financial resources!

An exhibition of tribal crafts was also arranged and spoken of in glowing terms by the organisers. Except the Bhardas (masks) and a few musical instruments, the exhibition had no original tribal art or craft to offer. How little these organising "experts" knew about tribal art was hugely illustrated by this exhibition. Not one of them would have been able to recognise a genuine piece of tribal work even if it was brought to them in the proverbial silver platter with watercress around it.

The work exhibited included bamboo tablemats, lamp shades, nut and fruit bowls, plant holders, etc., which the Spanish missionaries in this area commissioned from the tribals **according to their own designs**. Very creditable, no doubt, but one can hardly call the product the original Dangi tribal art. In the process, the native Dangi craft work, like their bamboo baskets, "toplas", and traps, were ignored. And they were ignored because locating and identifying them requires a great deal of patience, time, understanding and dedication which the educated city tribal developers do not have. After all, they're busy people and can only afford to pay flying visits to these areas!

The performances by the Dangis in the evenings were very few and in terms of variety, had little to offer. They were certainly not enough to give a comprehensive view of the total Dangi performing arts. By arranging the performances on the stage, the atmosphere of the forest associated with the dances and the music was also lost.

And that was the end of the Mahotsava.

Thousands of rupees were spent — mostly on the luxuries for the V.I.P. Guests while the tribal performers languished in anonymity. Their feeling of inadequacy was created and strengthened by this four-day encounter with the superior, educated city-folk who swarmed all over them for no apparent or tangible reason and left them as suddenly, back to their routine fight with the impoverished living conditions, confused and antagonistic.

Yet, in still another way, the Mahotsava did succeed. To a few persons, it must have certainly got grants to pursue their work in "Tribal Development". To some, social workers probably, legal sanction to carry on and complete their well-meant activities of "improving" these "backward" people. And to others, the Mahotsava for months to come will be an ideal "conversation piece" at parties, soirees and delightful evenings — occasions to display their deep and serious concern with such issues as they lounge around in air-conditioned drawing rooms, and turbaned servants softly pad across with iced drinks.

SANDHYA BORDEWEKAR

How To Control Inflation

India has been under intense inflationary pressure in recent years. The price rise since 1978 has been of the order of 40 per cent. Of course, the oil price increase is a major determining factor.

In India, the oil import bill in the current year is as high as Rs. 5,000 crores but it is likely to go up to Rs. 6,000 crores next year, mopping up nearly 80 per cent of our export earnings.

The increase in the prices of petroleum and petroleum products, and the consequent impact on the transport and energy cost of industrial commodities, have given a big push to inflation.

But there are other factors peculiar to India. Ours is still an agricultural country, and fluctuations in monsoons have a considerable effect on production and prices.

In the past four years or so, the fluctuations in the supply of foodgrains have been largely eliminated by the creation of buffer stocks. But there are other important commodities like sugar, pulses or edible oils which have considerably high weightage in the wholesale price index, and they are subject to supply fluctuations.

A large part of the inflation last year was due to the short-fall in sugarcane, pulses and edible oils.

Imported inflation is crucial too. This is so not only in respect of oil but other commodities like cement, caustic soda, paper, etc., besides machinery.

It is significant that many of these commodities have been imported at a high price, though these can be manufactured indigenously at a much lower cost.

The Government's response to the problem has been inadequate and unimaginative. Inflation of the kind we have cannot be checked by raising the rate of interest or squeezing credit, as the Government has done.

Indeed, if production is held up due to shortage of liquidity, or the cost of production and distribution is stepped up because of a higher interest rate, this is more likely to fan inflation than to control it.

In 1965-67 and 1972-74, our inflation was running at a high rate, and the Reserve Bank went in for extreme monetary controls. But inflation did not ease until production increased.

The authorities have been excessively concerned with the demand side of the price equation. More, important, it is the supply side that has to be looked into. Conditions have to be created for a rapid increase

in output at economic prices to enable high cost imports to be replaced by cheaper domestic supply.

Our Government is restraining, rather than encouraging the production of goods like cement, in which we enjoy comparative advantages. Why should we continue to import commodities which we can produce ourselves even at a lower cost?

The Government must involve experienced private parties in the exploration of oil. Apart from Bombay High, there are other sources — off-shore and on-shore which need to be explored quickly to make the country self-sufficient in oil.

If we concentrate on production and create conditions for its rapid growth, we can overcome inflation and balance the external payments position.

Our energy policy should also give due importance to alternative fuels to replace oil. Fortunately, India has a substantial reserve of coal which can replace oil in a variety of uses.

Apart from this, solar energy could be utilised particularly in agriculture for pumping out water from tubewells. India is in a specially advantageous position because we have plenty of sunshine throughout the year, and more so in summer when the need for irrigation is also high.

It is important to note that there is no raw material cost in Solar energy. All that is required is the necessary equipment. More research needs to be undertaken in this area. We must not shrink import of relevant technology from developed countries like Japan and the USA.

It is essential to consider short-term measures to improve the supply of power, coal, steel and cement to revive the economy. It should be possible to draw in private investible funds for schemes where returns are certain.

The embargo on private investment in power, mining and transport needs to be removed. Particular attention should be given to improving the performance of the public sector.

Speedy revival of the economy would depend among other things on the removal of supply bottlenecks affecting agriculture and industry, a step-up of exports, an increase in investment on essential lines, recasting of expenditure and investment priorities and a reallocation of material and scarce inputs towards productive investment and expansion of wage goods supply.

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THE WORLD OF BOOKS

THE BOHRAS by Asghar Ali Engineer. Vikas Publishing House. Price not stated.

Among the histories of the different sects of Islam, Asghar Ali Engineer's book "The Bohras" occupies a significant place. It is an important contribution to the understanding of the community and the reform movement within it. Mr. Engineer traces the origin, the development and the culmination of the Ismaili movement within the framework of Islam. He brings his Marxist ideology to the understanding of the movement's growth.

Mr. Engineer confines himself to the Ismaili movement as it led to the formation of the Bohra community. The followers of the Aga Khan are also Ismailis, but Mr. Engineer is silent on how the Ismailis emerged in their Aga Khani phase.

Mr. Engineer is the leader of the reformist Bohras. It is natural that he should refer to the reformist movement in its minutest details. He has done a splendid job in justifying its objectives. It is obvious from the book that the priestly class of the Bohras, headed by the Bohra High Priest, the Saydina, is oppressive and tyrannical in the extreme. Mr. Engineer argues that it is time the Government of India and the non-Bohra communities of this country, especially the leaders of other Muslim communities, should come to the rescue of the oppressed reformist Bohras.

It is saddening to read in this book how the other Muslim leaders and politicians, especially Sunni Ulemas, are bought by the Bohra High Priest, Saydina, and how they abet in the oppression of the reformist Bohras. Not a single Muslim leader or politician of repute has come forward to condemn this oppression, not only of the reformist Bohra men but also of women and children. It is shocking when Mr. Engineer mentions that even the Shahi Iman of Delhi has been bought over.

Mr. Engineer gives instances of how the leaders of various political parties are purchased by the Bohra High Priest to ignore reformist Bohras. The same is true of the Urdu press. Mr. Engineer also cites instances of the Bohra priesthood employing "goonda" elements to beat up progressive Bohra leaders. It is shocking that the Government of India is totally indifferent to this "State within the state" which the all-powerful hegemony of the Bohra High Priest represents.

According to Mr. Engineer, there are half a million Bohras all over the world and a sizeable section of them are reformists. They are spread over India, Pakistan and the East African countries. They are mostly prosperous traders from whom the Bohra High Priest collects crores of rupees, mostly by devious methods. It is time the Governments of these countries become conscious of the tentacles of the Bohra priesthood and take steps to end the tyranny of the Bohra High Priest. The book is well documented and Mr. Asghar Ali Engineer emerges as a leading scholar not only of Bohra history but of Islam in general.

ADAM ADIL

METAMORPHOSIS by Sivasankari. Translated from the Tamil by Krishna Srinivas. Pp 56.

This pretentiously titled book is described in the blurb as "the tragic tale of a heroic woman who fumed and quietened..." The translator tells us in a Foreword that the author "is sure to scale greater highs" and predicts, "A world prize will come natural to her."

This promise of inanity is amply fulfilled. The heroine Lavi is described on page 1. "Not much of make-up in visage... sweats ran down her face". Her rich father finds her a dream-husband and she approves instantly — and forthrightly: "Your Raju is really clever. Then what hell." And things are off to a flying start.

But soon Mother Nature throws a spanner in the works. Lavi develops some messy subterranean disorders which are described in gory and uninhibited detail. She finds she can't have babies. And match-making Papa dies in a crash in which "the plane burnt in full."

The "heroic" Lavi is however not so easily defeated. She is an emancipated woman whose favourite exclamation is "Hell". "Hell with this Society! Hell with hypocrisy," she cries, and arranges for a girl to bear her husband a test-tube baby.

Lavi persuades her husband to this plan in a series of love scenes in which, "nestling round her ivory neck," he "takes her into his throbbing arms." At one point she asks if he is tired. But, he-man that he is, "he swerved round and breasting her in full gleefully said, "Tired? Me? No. May I prove my freshness and rage?"

There follows a flash-back to the early life of the surrogate wife. She ran away from home at the age of 17 when "her chastity was preyed by the taylor", (sic) who then ditched her. She comes to the big city, Madras, dances in the nude in a film but doesn't go very far because, with commendable discrimination, "she refused her flesh to be preyed frequently."

Lavi's husband ultimately discovers her identity and they meet in a highly romantic climax. She appears before him with "angelic presence, sparkling flesh, dynamic eyes — motherhood everesting her beauty... It took him only few minutes," (we are laconically informed), "to drown himself in her flesh." He then confesses all to heroic Lavi, who heroically divorces him.

The discerning reader fumes but does not quieten. "Hell with this book," he says, and throws it in the dust-bin.

ZERIN ANKLESARIA

FREEDOM FIRST

A Letter and an Extract

Sir,

The revival of the "Friends of the Soviet Union" by comrade M.Ps in Delhi brings to mind the observations of Malcolm Muggeridge on such groups. They had sprung up all over the world during the thirties, in blind and credulous adulation of the proletarian paradise.

Many Gulags later, Western intellectuals know better and would wince if reminded of their "Friends" phase. With us in India, fashions die hard: in particular, political fashions, born out of mimicry of the West. They gratify our yearnings to appear progressive.

Malcolm Muggeridge in his admiration of Soviet Communism forsook his country for permanent residence in Moscow. Reality did not take long to catch up with him. His scorching castigation of the loathsome regime that he discovered as the **Manchester Guardian's** correspondent in Stalin's Russia is worth re-reading. Some extracts from his writings on the subject follow.

Yours,

8-4-1981

RADHA SHRIVASTAVA

Friends of the Soviet Union

... the dictatorship of the proletariat is cruel and arrogant, scornful of truth and liberty, indifferent to the suffering of individuals and classes and communities; incompetent and megalomaniac; ruthlessly intolerant of personal and corporate loyalties, hypocritical and stupid and corrupt, and has reduced a large population to a condition of poverty and misery and hopelessness that has to be seen to be believed. Nonetheless, dear friends of the Soviet Union, you sniff around the dictatorship of the proletariat with craven adulation like dogs around ordure.

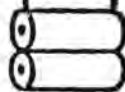
... There is nothing more dangerous, writes Taine, than a General Idea in narrow, empty minds. Being empty, they are incapable of questioning it; being narrow, before long it becomes an obsession. Thenceforth it takes complete control of them. They are no longer their own master, but become in the most literal sense, possessed.

Karl Marx and you have provided the General Idea, and the dictatorship of the proletariat has provided the empty, narrow mind. The result is the Soviet regime before which you grovel as people once grovelled before a casket containing Marat's heart.

When I consider how your fatuous idiocies have mocked the unhappy Russian population, and aroused false hopes and expectations amongst victims of economic distress in other countries, and in some cases led them to their subsequent bitter regret, to emigrate with their families to the proletarian paradise you have so fulsomely advertised, there to starve and suffer and curse your names ... When I reckon up your private and published reactions to the Soviet regime, you with your General Idea, seem to me more contemptible, if not more dangerous, than the dictatorship of the proletariat with its empty, narrow mind.

No worse fate can befall a society, dear Friends of the Soviet Union, than to fall into your hands. A General Idea is the most terrible of all tyrants. Individual tyrants have their moods and must at last die, it is inflexible and immortal. Individual tyrants only require a sense of personal supremacy, only destroy whoever and whatever challenges their personal supremacy; it destroys everything and everyone in the essence of destruction — in towns, a darkness, a paralysis; in the country, a blight, sterility. Shouting monotonously its empty formula — a classless, socialist society — it attacks with methodical barbarity, not only men and classes and institutions, but the soul of a society. It tears a society up by the roots and leaves it dead. "If we go," Lenin said "we shall slam the door on an empty house."

I cannot imagine any worse possibility even in this unhappy uncertain time than that you should be able to enthrone your General Idea elsewhere. The fact that it's first meal would be you, though just, would be no compensation for its subsequent ravages. Your attitude towards the Soviet regime shows how little you realise the General Idea's potentialities. Even so, I notice that few, if any of you venture to exchange the capitalist tyranny you denounce for the proletarian bliss whose praises you sing so lustily; and it is gratifying to find that working class organizations with which you are connected profoundly distrust your General Idea and the political programme you deduce from it.



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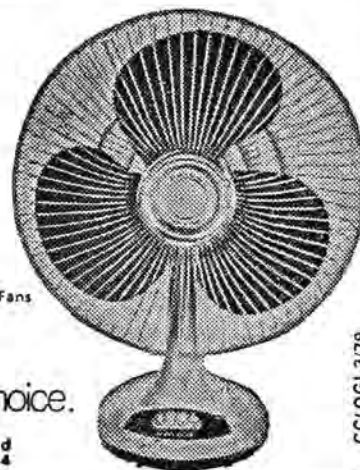
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United Nations Human Rights Commission Takes up the Sakharov Case

At the outset of the annual meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Commission held in Geneva, the Sakharov case was raised on February 5, 1980, by the French delegation which proposed that a cable be sent to the Soviet Government expressing concern and asking for information about Sakharov's confinement in Gorky.

As might be expected, the proposal proved highly controversial, and the Commission postponed consideration of the matter by deciding to take up the Sakharov case under a later agenda item as a priority.

A month later, when Agenda Item 12 concerning gross violations of human rights in all parts of the world was reached, the Commission once again took up consideration of the Sakharov case.

Neither side — those nations endorsing the proposal to send a telegram, and those seeking to block any such action and to remove Sakharov from the Commission's agenda — was secure enough of its support to seek a vote. As a result, the proposal to send a telegram was never voted upon.

However, it was decided by consensus "to defer consideration of the question of Andrei Sakharov until the next session when the subject will be given a priority". What significance the item will be given next year remains an open question, dependent in part on Dr. Sakharov's personal situation next year.

League Representative Sidney Liskofsky requested the Division of Human Rights to circulate a written statement which commented generally on the repression of human rights advocates in various countries but which focussed specifically on Dr. Sakharov's case.

The Division declined to circulate the statement, and because of procedural confusion the statement also was not presented orally during the Commission's general debate.

The League's statement is presented here in its entirety in order to make it publicly available, and to re-emphasize the importance of future United Nations action on this case.

We have been reminded in the Commission's resolution E/CN.4/L.1509/Rev.1, approved February 29, of its consistent emphasis on the role of individuals in promoting human rights, of the dependence of human rights progress on an informed public, and of the incompatibility with state obligations of unlawful limitations and persecution of persons exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Because our organization's efforts, its *raison d'être*, are premised on these self-evident propositions, we are impelled to express our concern about the hardships faced by individuals in many countries in their human rights endeavors. The intimidating and repressive means used to inhibit and undermine their public

expressions on human rights situations and conditions are no mystery.

A reader of the daily press could readily draw up a formidable list: constant police surveillance, tapping or severing telephone contacts, interfering with the mails, revoking the right and means to publish, preventing contact with the press, punitive disemployment, arbitrary arrest, forcing into external or internal exile (a current news item reports the recent introduction of the latter practice in Chile), involuntary expatriation, vexatious prosecution of fabricated charges, physical manhandling and worse.

No one region or country has a monopoly of these nefarious devices, various of which have been used, for example, on Huang Hsieh-Chieh, editor of the banned Taiwanese magazine *Formosa*; Beyers Naude and Winnie Mandela in South Africa; Domingo Laino in Paraguay; Senator Benigno Aquino in the Philippines; Andrei Sakharov in the Soviet Union.

While we are concerned for the rights and security of all these noble spirits, we wish on this occasion to comment particularly on the case of Andrei Sakharov because of his relationship to our organization and the special place he occupies in the hearts and minds of the lovers of freedom the world over.

As he is Honorary Vice President and Board member of the International League for Human Rights and the chairman founder of our affiliated committee on human rights in Moscow, his fate profoundly concerns us. However, more important than his relationship to us is who he is and what he stands for: a giant in wisdom and moral courage, who, disregarding career, material comfort, and health, has persisted in speaking and writing plain and simple truths about the problems of human rights in his own country and elsewhere in the world, and about other overriding problems — the nuclear threat, for example — confronting humanity in our precarious time.

Andrei Sakharov has drawn attention to the principles in the Universal Declaration and the conventions and other international human rights agreements drawn up, affirmed and re-affirmed by the United Nations — agreements his own government has accepted.

He has talked — comparing principle with practice — of the freedoms to speak, to write, to publish, to assemble, to associate, to fair trial, to manifest religion or other belief, to perpetuate one's culture, to leave any country including one's own, and to return to his country.

He has pleaded for the rule of law — his own country's law as well as international law — and has preached and himself practiced the ideal of non-violence.

He has declined to turn his back on fellow members of his human rights committee, and of others

who have dared to speak and write about human rights, who have been systematically silenced by penalization and intimidation.

In awarding Andrei Sakharov its Prize, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee has but certified what people throughout the world had long recognized in this scientist-philosopher: a rare and treasured voice of the conscience of mankind, a voice it can ill-afford to lose.

We earnestly hope the Commission will help clarify and thereby alleviate the situation of Andrei Sakharov, Winnie Mandela and other individuals striving to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, so that they may once again, in accordance with the promises of the international human rights agreements, including the Helsinki Accords (1975), exercise his (their) right "to know and act upon his (their) rights and duties" and to speak out "in accordance with the dictates of his (their) conscience."

From *Human Rights Bulletin*
the International League for Human Rights
236 East 46 Street, New York N. Y. 10017

VIGILANT WOMAN. Vigil Series — 4. Vigil India Movement, 13 Charles Campbell Road, Bangalore 560 005. Pp 27. Rs. 2/-.

Every year thousands of tourists flock to the town of Kanya Kumari in the State of Tamil Nadu which lies at the Southern-most tip of the Indian peninsula. It is at this point that the waters of the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea mingle. Flanked by the Western ghats to the East and its long coastline washed by the Arabian Sea forming its western border, Kanya Kumari District is one of the most picturesque places in India.

Those people who are dependent on the sea for their livelihood have naturally found Kanya Kumari's sea coast to their advantage, and the fishermen's villages all along the coastal region are many centuries old. Kanya Kumari District has a population of over 12 lakhs.

The eighty-three village Women's Vigil Groups with their three thousand literate and illiterate members distributed in the various parts of Kanya Kumari District stand together in their struggles. They know they are part of a wider national fellowship of rural and urban men and women committed to tireless and fearless struggle in the building up of a new society.

It is hard, it is slow. But these many small acts of love and courage help to lay the much-needed strong foundation for a just society.

The struggle of these young women goes on. They are a determined lot. Their strength comes mainly from their togetherness.

The following are not isolated and individual incidents. The various groups confer among themselves to plan their strategies.

Every Vigil Group has over thirty members. It is a new experience in the history of the village for the women to meet and discuss their common problems.

Their men's interest is also aroused. Together they fight oppression.

The Conveners of the 83 Vigil Groups meet once every three months to study wider issues and their achievements and failures. Again, once every month Conveners in the four areas of the District meet separately to discuss local problems and set their Agenda for action.

The Vigil Group workers are mostly unemployed or underemployed poor women. They get no remuneration for Vigil work. Vigilance has become part of their lives. Many of them have gone through intensive two-week socio-political courses offered by the National Office of the Vigil India Movement. Some have gone through a three-month course also.

Through learning and experience these people have become the backbone of the Movement in the Kanya Kumari District.

M. A. THOMAS

(From the Introduction)

Against The National Security Act

This meeting of the Bombay Branch of the People's Union for Civil Liberties unreservedly condemns the promulgation and enforcement of the National Security Act and similar laws of Preventive Detention on the specious plea of maintenance of law and order and prevention of crimes.

The meeting records that the assurance by spokesmen of Government that the National Security Act will not be used against political opponents or dissidents is belied by actual acts of detention in several States.

The meeting is of the firm opinion that laws of Preventive Detention are a barbaric and blatant denial of civil liberties and a frontal attack on human freedom.

The meeting affirms that such laws are not at all necessary in a civilized society except perhaps in times of war.

The meeting draws the attention of the people to past experience that such laws enacted for ostensible purpose of maintaining security or preventing crime, corrode the efficiency of the organisation for investigation of crimes, lead to large scale abuse of the powers and facilitate the march towards authoritarianism.

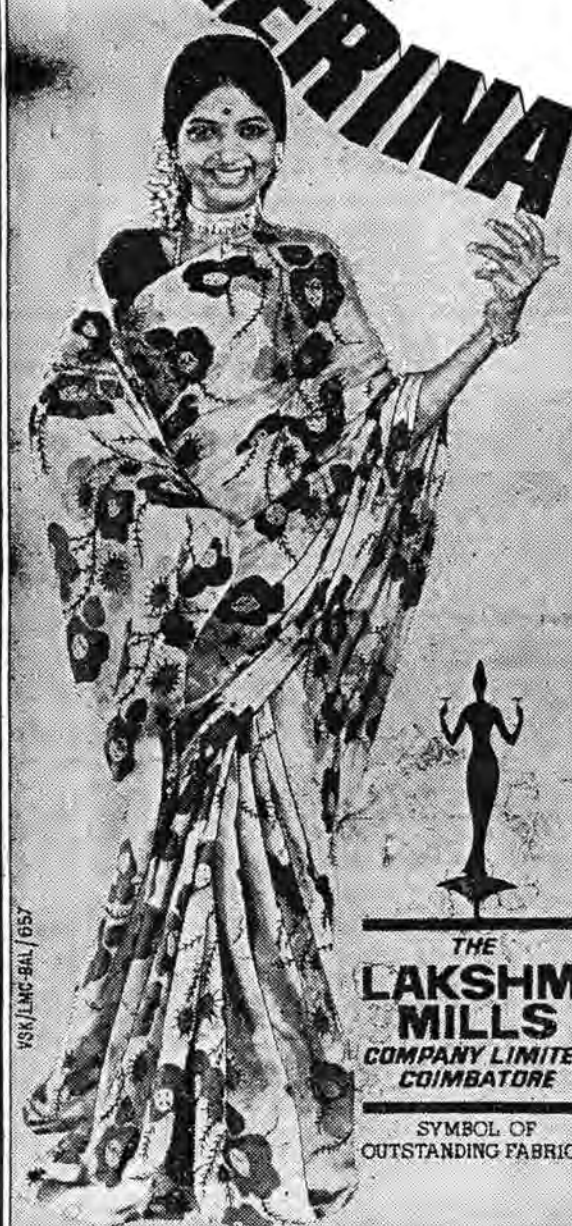
This meeting of the PUCL (Bombay) therefore appeals to all people to agitate for the repeal of all laws of Preventive Detention including the National Security Act.

Proposed by: M. A. Rane
Seconded by: Prof. V. B. Kamath

17/4/1981

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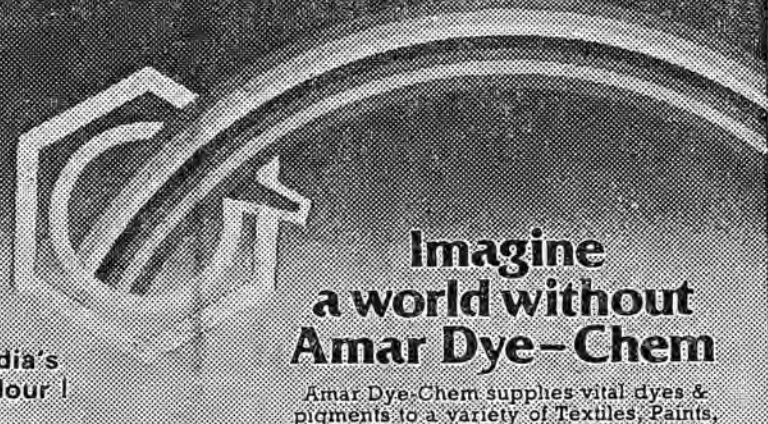

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