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EDITORS : S. V. RAJU

GEETA DOCTOR

HAVEN'T WE HAD ENOUGH?

M. R. MASANI

Let us consider the state of the Nation today. I shall quote one or two remarks from different kinds of newspapers and journals. A few days ago the London *Economist*, a highly reputable paper and probably the best weekly of its kind in the world, said: "Indian politics has sunk to a new depth from which it will not easily recover." In one sentence we had been written off. The *Statesman* of Calcutta said: "The country will view the new Government born in sin, out of crass opportunism, with trepidation." *India Today* (August 1-15) wrote:

"Political prostitution has stooped to new levels to conquer. The lurid drama enacted in New Delhi last week, with both the Janata Party and Janata (S) jockeying for support at the cost of submitting lists with fake members, with Morarji Desai greedily clinging to his hold of the party, with Raj Narain hurling invective, Indira Gandhi driving hard bargains and George Fernandes squandering all self-respect, is the sort of scenario played every night among street-walkers. . . "Like bands of itinerant eunuchs roaming the streets to celebrate the curse of their social ostracism, Indian politicians too have come to represent the rock-bottom of Indian society, faithless, fickle and fragmented in their chronic quest for power, they have reduced the ethics of the power game to a squalid strip tease. . . "Ironically politics has become the last refuge of the impotent. . .

"... does the common man care? He can see now that they all belong to the same flock of black sheep, dyed in the same wool, bleating the same dirge of discontent. . ."

These are very harsh words. I do not write in that style.

Public opinion in India, judging by the press and public I meet, is very volatile. About a month ago I couldn't hear anyone saying anything good about

Mr. Morarji Desai. Why? Because he was clinging to office and refusing to resign. It will be recalled that Jayaprakash and many others requested him to step down and let Mr. Jagjivan Ram lead the party so that a new Janata Government could be formed. At that time there was much disgust with Morarji. I used to say at that time to friends that Morarji-bhai was not such a bad man as he was made out.

Today Choudhury Charan Singh is being sworn at and Morarjibhai is forgotten. The same people who were condemning Morarjibhai one month ago have forgotten all the sins of Janata for the last two and a half years and are concentrating on Mr. Charan Singh. Of course Mr. Charan Singh has behaved badly. But we cannot go on oscillating like this. Let us keep our perspective.

If you consider the record from March 1977 up to date, you will find that there is very little to choose between various politicians in India. In fact Mr. Palkhivala, when he came to India while he was still Ambassador, addressed a meeting at the CCI grounds in February this year, said he was not supposed to discuss India but he did make one remark which covers the whole situation. He said in America there is a thing called Murphy's Law. Murphy's Law is "If anything can go wrong, it will." and, he said, that summarised the whole situation in India then. The ineptitude of the Janata government was hard to imagine.

We are now told that there are two big crimes that Mr. Charan Singh has committed. One is defection. And the other that he had taken the support of Mrs. Indira Gandhi to become Prime Minister. Both these are charges that one can level against him. But let us consider the score. When Mr. Morarji Desai won the election in 1977 he declared that the Janata Party would not accept a single defector. They accepted hundreds. From April 1977 upto June or

(Continued on page 6)

"the time has come," the
walrus said,
"to talk of many things:
of shoes-and ships-
and sealing wax-
of cabbages -
and kings-"

-Lewis Carroll



OF CABBAGES & KINGS

Devastation At Morvi

Do Indian newspapers take a "ho-hum" view of natural disasters wondered the BBC in one of its programmes soon after calamitous floods had swept through Morvi. The BBC answered its own question with the comment that people in India tend to regard floods as a natural, and hence inevitably recurring, phenomenon, and are never very surprised by them and therefore the generally low news value given to such events.

The implications of such an attitude are chilling, particularly since it is all too common to meet persons who endorse this view with the bland remark that in a country of some 700 million people, a couple of thousand people wiped out here or there is not going to make very much of a difference. The newspapers did in fact contribute to this haziness by providing conflicting reports as to the number of dead, some mentioning 1000 as the initial figure and others as much as 25,000. The general feeling after such disasters is that one will never know the truth, the authorities being more concerned in burying the dead, and possibly their responsibility in the matter also, as quickly as they may.

In the face of this it was heartening to note the immediate and active response for aid amongst various organizations and groups. The donations came not only from the larger industrial houses, who are in fact always prompt in responding to such calamities, but also from the ordinary citizen in cities like Bombay, where the drive to collect clothes and cash was quick and vigorous. "Let us eat half a slice of bread and help our brothers and sisters in Morvi" was the slogan. Even those who may not actually have given anything could not have remained deaf to the sentiment behind such an appeal, a reminder that in a healthy democracy, it's not merely the numbers that count but the individuals who make up those numbers.

In the circumstance, one of the noteworthy gestures was the one made by the textile workers of Ahmedabad. Mr. Arvind Buch the president of the Textile Labour Association is reported to have announced that the textile workers of Ahmedabad would contribute Rs. 20 lakhs, the largest amount made until that time, for relief work at Morvi, by a practical demonstration of their sympathy. They would work, according to Mr. Buch, on the 15th August holiday and contribute that day's wages to the relief fund.

Besides being in the best spirit of sacrifice to help others, this one action is yet another reminder of the suicidal drain on the country's resources by the meaningless proliferation of holidays. The celebration of 15th August is only one such example, instituted it would seem, solely for the benefit of politicians who like to harangue the public from the picturesque setting of the Red Fort. To the victims of Morvi, the irony of "Independence from what?" must have appeared too deep even for thought. **GD**

To Asean With Music

The Indonesians, a fun loving, if sometimes volatile, people, are being credited with establishing a new code of behaviour at summit meetings. According to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, the climax of the recent Asean foreign ministers conference at Bali, was a musical performance organised by the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Dr. Mochtar Kusumaatmadja ('Mochtar the Doctor' to friends) in which each of the Foreign Ministers of Asean and their counterparts from the United States, Japan, Australia and New Zealand were coaxed to take the mike and sing after their supper.

While mentioning that the Australian Foreign Minister, Andrew Peacock could only manage a duet with Cyrus Vance to explain in plain prose why they could not make a musical contribution to the evening, the report goes on to commend in warm tones the virtuoso performance of the Japanese Foreign Minister, Sunao Sunoda, who sang a song about a brave young samurai. "Startled guests" says the commentator, "were convinced at first that he must have swallowed the microphone, so inspiring was his song of praise about the Warrior".

Under similar circumstances, one hates to think of the problems an Indian foreign minister would have had to face. If he sang a ghazal, the DMK would have threatened to talk of secession; if his song did not refer to the plight of Harijans, he would have been recalled in the middle of it, and if he so much as mentioned the glories of Bharat, that is India, he would have been branded as an agent of the RSS and forced to spend the rest of his life in exile at an RSS shaka. Yet for all that one concedes that the problems confronting an Indian Foreign Minister would be nothing as compared to those that an Iranian one would have to resolve. If he had indulged himself in music, an Iranian

Foreign Minister would immediately have been asked to come home and climb the gallows which the good Ayatollah now regrets not having raised in the first place to cleanse the Iranian race of all such creatures. "Music" he declared, "is no better than opium" and is being used he warned by the USA and their agents the Zionists to destroy the Iranian youth. It seems unlikely that he would agree with Shakespeare when he said:

"The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils."

No doubt Shakespeare will shortly be banned in Iran as an early Zionist. **GD**

Commonsense And the Constitution

Was the President justified in dissolving the Lok Sabha and ordering fresh elections?

Would he have been within his rights in rejecting the coalition government's advice to dissolve the Lok Sabha?

Should not the President have given Mr. Jagjivan Ram, the leader of the single largest party in the Lok Sabha (205 of the 542 seats), an opportunity to form a government and seek a vote of confidence?

Did the President have to ask Charan Singh to continue as a caretaker government? Could he not have formed a government of non-political persons instead?

Let constitutional pundits ponder the finer points of the law. What would the commonsense answers be to these posers?

In his pre-Independence Day broadcast, President Sanjiva Reddi observed among other things:

"We have to take note of the rapidly changing life style of our body politics. Never since Independence have principles been compromised and the basic values of life treated with such contempt. The time is ripe now for enlightened public opinion in the mainstream of our national life to consider the steady and cumulative deterioration of standards in public life and public morality in all its aspects and review the provisions of the Constitution in the light of our experience of working it over the last three decades."

He was clearly serving notice of what he had in mind if Charan Singh failed to secure a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha on August 20. Obviously he had made up his mind that fresh elections would be the answer.

The President also said:

"Our Constitution which is the most comprehensively written Constitution in the world cannot obviously provide for every possible contingency in our national life.

"Necessarily, therefore, healthy conventions based on sound and lasting principles of public morality and uncompromisable basic values in public life will have to be evolved."

But did his courage fail him in establishing an excellent convention by installing a genuine caretaker government of non-party men or did conflicting legal viewpoints persuade him to follow the beaten path?

SVR

The President's Options

Was the President justified in dissolving Parliament and ordering fresh elections?

Of course he was. The *Statesman* of August 22 reported that Mr. Reddi had "taken a dim view of the current spate of defections and feels that the situation is clearly 'alarming' and such a phenomenon — so common at the State level — should not be allowed at the national level."

In other words, in the view of the President, an alternative government would not have solved the problem. It would have only promoted a fresh crop of defections and in the process enriching quite a few MPs. With a listed strength of 205 members, the Janata Party, though the largest party in the Lok Sabha, would have needed another 65 to claim a majority in the House (or the uncertain support of Mrs. Gandhi's Congress). Where would the 65 come from? Even assuming that the AIADMK and Akalis had voted Janata they would still have fallen short. Entice MPs from the Congress (S) and the Janata (S). QED. Hence the justification for the President's action in dissolving the House and ordering fresh elections.

Would he have been within his rights in rejecting the coalition government's advice to dissolve the Lok Sabha?

Why not? After all, the Charan Singh government never got around to securing the support of the Lok Sabha as the President wanted it to. Mr. Charan Singh funk'd the vote of confidence and lost the right to govern. Under these circumstances what right had he to offer any kind of advice to the President? When Mr. Y. B. Chavan confessed his inability to form a government, would he have been justified in advising the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha? The only difference that while Mr. Chavan accepted his lack of a majority before considering office, Mr. Charan Singh took office and then advised dissolution despite lacking a majority.

Should not the President have given Mr. Jagjivan Ram, the leader of the single largest party in the Lok Sabha an opportunity to form a government and seek a vote of confidence?

He could easily have done so. The possibility of defections notwithstanding, the President would have been equally justified in inviting the leader of the largest single party in the House to form a government and secure its approval. Mr. Desai as leader of the Janata Party forfeited the right when it was discovered that his list of supporters included a few bogus ones. However when the Janata Party had a new leader and the President had by then already given an opportunity, first to the then leader of the Opposition Mr. Y. B. Chavan, and thereafter to

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A STATESMAN ENTERPRISE

Mr. Charan Singh, it stands to reason that the newly elected leader of the single largest party could also have been given an opportunity. However to attribute to the President ulterior motives suggesting that he was against the Harijans, is being less than fair. The fact is the President had two options — both correct — dissolve parliament or invite Mr. Jagjivan Ram. He opted for the former. **SVR**

Poll Yes ! Charan No !

The President can be faulted for asking Charan Singh to continue as a caretaker government. Any caretaker government would have been unrepresentative. That being the case, he need not have asked for a controversial one. With Charan Singh's known predilections and the pressures on him to take populist measures, the opposition has every reason to fear misuse of power in furthering the ruling coalition's electoral fortunes.

This fear is not something new. It forms the recurring theme of Rajaji's views on the subject of electoral reform. Rajaji demanded that the country should be ruled by non-politicians six months before any general elections. Writing in the *Swarajya* of August 13, 1960, Rajaji pointed out:

"In a welfare State, so called, the power of the ruling party is enormous. . . The period just before the election is utilised to pile up deceptive bribe measures and to collect election funds for defeating all opposition parties. . . where the ruling party holds a rope round the necks of everyone concerned in business, high or low, and where public funds are utilised so as to appear as gifts from the ruling party. . ."

Therefore, advised Rajaji:

"the ruling ministers should hand over their reins of office at least six months before polling day to the President of the Union. . . who should run the administration with the assistance of permanent officials. . . This will cleanse the whole atmosphere of the many foul infections that now prevail during election time." (*Swarajya*, February 10, 1962)

Acharya Kripalani, while critical of the decision to hold fresh elections as it would open a Pandora's box of vilification and abuse," gave similar advice recently when he said that the President should have nominated a government of non-political persons.

Already there are reports of official misuse of authority. The *Indian Express* of August 24 carried a report entitled "Pre-poll sops" which among things said:

"The caretaker government of Mr. Charan Singh is likely to grant various pre-election concessions which may not be pre-empted by the President's directive forbidding 'new policies' or 'new spending of a significant order.'"

"The first such concession, "says the report," is expected to be made to farmers in the form of enhanced Kharif support prices. . .

"Similarly the Government may grant whatever dearness allowance is admissible to its employees

on the basis of the rising consumer price index. "Various fiscal reliefs in excise and customs duties can also be made. For instance, only today the Finance Ministry announced complete withdrawal of the duties on pig iron used by mini-steel plants.

Another is the misuse of the media. The *Times of India* of August 25 reports interference by Ministers. The report lists a number of instances of the "increasingly intolerant attitude shown by the government."

According to press reports the President was, at one stage, considering the possibility of a national government of all parties. In fact according to the *Statesman* Mr. Jagjivan Ram was invited by him to head such a consensus caretaker government but declined. From his points of view, he was perhaps right in declining the offer. **SVR**

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HAVEN'T WE HAD ENOUGH?— (Continued from page 1)

July, Members of Parliament, State legislators, politicians in scores joined the Janata Party and were received with open arms. They deserted Mrs. Indira Gandhi when she was down, and they were accepted. Mr. Jagjivan Ram and Mr. Bahuguna, two pillars of the Janata Party and now of the Janata (S) defected from Mrs. Indira Gandhi and they came over to the winning side. When Mr. Jagjivan Ram attacks Mr. Charan Singh for defecting, I ask "who is talking"? Mr. Jagjivan Ram supported the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution in Parliament and he had supported the resolution approving of the Emergency.

Now let us take the question of Mrs. Gandhi's support. Of course it was wrong for Mr. Charan Singh, after expressing the views he has done about Mrs. Gandhi, to accept the support of her 70 odd MPs to make a majority. Granted. But later, first Mr. Chandrashekar, the President of the Janata Party, then Mr. Morarji Desai and Mr. Jagjivan Ram expressed their readiness to accept Mrs. Gandhi's support. In fact they asked why they should not accept her support. What was wrong with it? And one of them said: "how can we say no to her?"

You can say 'no' and it has been done in several countries, of Europe. In Italy and many Scandinavian and Benelux countries when a very close division takes place on a motion of confidence for the Prime Minister, the Prime Ministers of liberal and democratic parties have got up before the vote and told the Speaker: "I want to announce that I shall not count the votes of the Communist Party which I do not want in my majority. If I do not get a majority without them, I will not rule." So this idea: "how can we say no to her" is nonsense.

Therefore in this quest for Mrs. Gandhi's support there is nothing to choose between the two. Both of them are trying to get the support of the person whom they described in most libellous language only a few months ago. They want to send her to jail, but they want her votes at the same time.

Our politicians of course tried to avoid the elections like the plague. I suppose half of them know they will lose their seats. They were racing from the people, each competing with the other on how to avoid a dissolution. If you will read their statements carefully, you will find that the bait is dangled before the MPs: 'Don't worry, you can vote for me without the danger of having to face the people.' But suppose they have miscalculated? The President may have to dissolve Parliament. Will that solve the problem? I wish it could. But supposing tomorrow Parliament is dissolved and elections come in October, November or December. If these are the only persons who are going to stand for election, then God help India because the people would have no one else to vote for. You can't defeat them without putting someone else in their place. You cannot defeat a horse in a race without another horse winning the race. We can't cast a negative vote and say they are bad fellows and should be

thrown out. We leave a vacuum. Nature and politics abhor a vacuum.

So my fear is that an immediate "mid-term poll" as it is wrongly called, will solve nothing. Mr. Devraj Urs who is a very down to earth politician said the other day something very accurate. He said a mid-term poll held immediately would not help clear the present political confusion in the country. It might help if it was properly timed. I think he is right in this sense that if there is an election in October or November the same 500 bad eggs will get back, with some slight difference in votes.

Most people think that Mrs. Gandhi will increase her support. I am inclined to agree that, out of disgust with what has happened in the last two and a half years a backlash may favour Mrs. Gandhi whose sins are being forgotten very quickly. Of course her support, and she has now achieved a balance of power position, is very valuable. She can bring down whoever she likes and she can also persuade the President to dissolve Parliament whenever she wants. By pulling the rug from under the feet of both potential Prime Ministers, she might force the President to call an election. She is in a strong — not moral, but constitutional — position. Her support in fact is no support at all as these two gentlemen who are vying for it will soon realise.

In 1925 the Communist Party of Great Britain asked Moscow, their masters, "should we support Ramsay MacDonald or not?" Ramsay MacDonald was a Labour leader who had formed a minority government and the British Communist Party wanted their paymasters in Moscow to tell them whether or not to support him. Just as our Communist Party gets instructions from Moscow. You can judge from what the Indian Communist Party does whom Moscow is backing. So when the message went to Moscow from London in 1925 a telegram came back: "Yes, we shall support Ramsay MacDonald as the rope supports the hanged man."

I do not know if you read an excellent article in the *Indian Express* of 9th August by my friend Mr. S. Mulgaokar its Editor, entitled "Mrs. Gandhi is Back at the Centre of the Stage". He put it very clearly that there is nothing to choose between the two sides. By their stupidity, they have put the lady in the centre of the stage and she is now dictating terms to both of them.

Mr. Kuldip Nayar wrote in the *Indian Express* of July 25: "Many people have begun to believe that the Emergency minus the aberrations was not such a bad thing after all." I think you hear this remark made by many of your neighbours now. People are getting nostalgic for the Emergency. "The incompetence of the Janata government", says Mr. Nayar, "has set the process of thinking that some kind of disciplined or guided democracy is necessary for a country like India. Intellectuals are hesitant to talk of dictatorship but coin different nomenclatures to convey the same idea." The danger is therefore that, if this nonsense goes on any longer in Delhi the

people would be in a mood to throw the baby of democracy out with the bathwater of the politicians.

How to throw the politicians out without destroying democracy is our problem.

What India needs is democracy with discipline and discipline without dictatorship. Today, we have democracy without discipline. Under Indira Gandhi we had discipline without democracy. We want democracy with discipline and discipline without dictatorship. This is the task that faces the Indian people. It is not an easy one for people like us. Is there a way out? Most of my friends think there is no way out. We are doomed and we must wait to be destroyed. I am a realist, I hope but I am also a reasonable optimist. I feel there is a way out.

There is no need for this country, with its intelligence and patriotism, because we have a great reservoir of intelligence and patriotism, just to sit back and see the country drift to dictatorship or chaos and then feel sorry for ourselves. Next time it may not finish in two years. After all it is a very great stroke of luck that Mrs. Gandhi, unlike dictators, called a free election and bowed out. How many dictators have called a free election and given in to the verdict? I can't remember any dictator who has ever done it. She is perhaps the first one. All honour to her in a way. Whatever it is, whatever her motives or miscalculation, she did it. She did not queer the pitch and when she lost she gave in. Now these are two things that dictators do not normally do. But can we count on these bonuses every time? I think next time, if it comes, it may come for life. It is very much time now that we consider how to stop this happening. Can we create in India in the next year or two a government which gives discipline with democracy and without dictatorship?

Discipline is necessary. There is no question about it. We can't have a breakdown of law and order and indiscipline in every walk of life. Mr. Walter Lipmann in his great book *The Public Philosophy* said that when a big country is faced with a choice between a strong but authoritarian government and a weak but democratic government, it chooses the stronger one. He says that the lesson of history is that people prefer order to democracy. They want both of course. But if they can't have both, then they choose authoritarianism. There is no reason why the Indian people should be any different.

Now how can this be done? I think this is a very difficult process and is not very easy. It lies in creating a new climate of opinion, a new character and a new consensus. That new climate would want two things. One is clean government without corruption, a requirement of personal integrity among those who take office. Mr. N. A. Palkhivala in a magnificent talk on television a few days ago said that the trouble in India is that we are ruled by professional politicians, who make money out of politics, and cannot make it any other way. So, if people with private means, with incomes of their own, professional people, business people, trades people and farmers go into politics they will be able to maintain

a certain standard of public life. In other words, we want an end to professional politics. We want the amateur in politics in India very badly today. It has been said in the past that war is too important to be left to the generals. I would say that in India today politics has become too important to leave to the professional politicians. The citizen has to take his place. How do we get him to do it?

I would say that one of the factors that have made for the corruption of our public life is Statism, State Capitalism and the controlled economy, call it what you like. It has meant that the politician has acquired economic power on top of political power. Today the politician and the civil servant can put money into the pockets of a rich man, crores of rupees, by giving him a licence or a permit. The man who gives the permit is poor. The man who wants it is rich. It is a ready made situation for corruption. Is it any surprise that politicians and civil servants take bribes? So the Permit-Licence Raj, as Rajaji called it or socialism as others like to call it, is the bane of India. We must give up this pattern, which Nehru inflicted on us for thirty years now of making the government all powerful in economic life, in business, in industry, in agriculture, in education, sports, and the arts.

We have got to retrieve our territory from the aggressor. Our territory has been occupied by the enemy and the enemy is the government. We have to drive government back to its proper boundaries. Government has its proper responsibilities. We need Government. We want strong government. But we don't have strong government. We have a big flabby government. What we want is limited but strong government — strong in its own sphere of law and order, protecting the country, providing water, power, coal and roads. None of this is being done. Today we have a weak government which does not fulfil its own responsibilities but dabbles in others, tells us what to produce, what price to charge. People are being punished today for producing too much. Today under the law if you produce more than your quota you can be punished, as if it is a crime to produce when the need of the day is for higher production.

Gandhiji was very wise. He used to say "that government is best which governs the least." Limited government — that is the liberal creed. In India government has become omnipotent and omnipresent but it doesn't do its own work. Law and order is finished, but they will dabble in every business which is not theirs, interfering in all kinds of ridiculous ways. So I would say you cannot have honest politics unless you give up this State Capitalism. We should go back to limited government where government does its work and people are free to do their jobs and make progress.

Mr. Palkhivala in his speeches on the budget used to call it a U turn. He was absolutely right. And a U turn can be carried out. It has been done. I give you two countries in Asia, leave alone Germany and Britain. In Sri Lanka, President Jayawardene has,

with great courage, removed all the socialist nonsense and gone back to a liberal economy. And Egypt where President Sadat, who discarded Nasserism, has saved his country from the legacy of Nasserism. Here are two leaders of Asia who had the patriotism and the courage to find that their country was on the wrong path, to discard it and make a U turn. If Egypt and Sri Lanka can make a U turn, why can't we? We can't because we lack leadership.

So this is the second thing that has to be done. We have got to change our economic pattern and make a U turn. Why is it important to make a U turn? There are two different reasons. Our democracy is very weak. It is a tender plant. It has to be nursed. We should lighten the burden so that our young democracy can take the strain on its shoulders. Secondly by giving financial and economic power to the politicians we have raised the stakes of the race. A man who may not cheat for a thousand rupees may cheat for a crore. We have made it possible for politicians to make lakhs and crores. In the old days when a man took bribes he took Rs. 10 or Rs. 20 — the railway booking clerk, the policeman when you committed a traffic offence. That was petty corruption that did not affect our national life. Today in one deal a minister or a politician can make lakhs, sometimes crores. Therefore by raising the stakes of power we have made the fight for power more unscrupulous. People who do not cheat or murder for a small amount may do so for a big amount. Take the temptation away from them by giving them no

economic power but giving them the right to govern. Immediately you will find that the whole temper of our politics will change. Beverly Nicols, a British writer, once said humourously "I can resist everything but temptation." Now, we are putting temptation in the way of our politicians. Let us remove temptation from them.

As I said earlier, we cannot replace something with nothing. We can't say we don't want five hundred odd people in parliament unless we produce scores of other people. The challenge therefore is to produce good citizens to take their place in the Lok Sabha and we have to do it in the next six months. I don't care what label they have or what ideology they have. Let them be honest citizens who will do their duty and not sell themselves.

India is in great danger. This is how I feel after forty years of public life and I feel very sad that my younger friends do not make it possible for people of my generation to join them and give them the guidance and support we can. But they must carry the ball.

The challenge is to people in their thirties, forties and fifties. The challenge is at our doorstep. We can either fail or we can succeed. If we don't succeed, I can tell you later on there will be no time. You can't wait for an election to be announced and then start thinking what to do. This is the time to begin, to take steps that will lead to the saving of this country.

(Based on a talk to the Progressive Group, Bombay, on 9th August, 1979)

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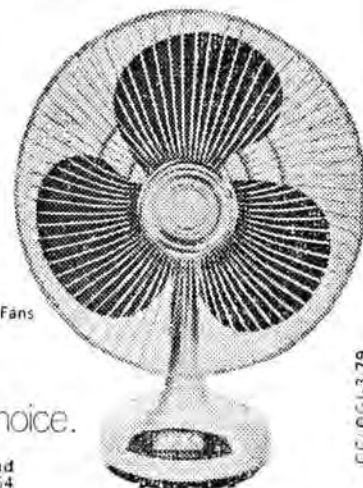
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K. H. Subramaniam

'Consumerism' means the conservation and consolidation of the individual consumer's rights against the organised producer. When the term is used as between buyer and seller, it stands for the buyer, as between the State and individual, for the individual as between doctor and patient, for the patient. Consumerism in my judgement, could be defined in a nutshell as 'getting value for money in terms of goods and services.'

It is of course self-evident that everyone of us is a consumer; what is not so clearly perceived however is that each one of us is in more situations, a consumer than a producer; and that as consumers we are part of the largest interest group. Unfortunately this group is rather amorphous and tends to get blurred behind more prominent interest groupings. This, in my opinion, is the notable feature of the Indian consumer scene. We tend to regard ourselves more primarily as chartered accountants, doctors and engineers and only then as consumers. Quite naturally the consumer viewpoint gets the least consideration, if any at all, in a conflict between two interest groups.

The following will illustrate what I wish to say. There was this big company in Madras with an enviable record of industrial peace and employee relations. The wages were high, conditions excellent and benefits numerous. Over the years, the Company had come to pay a bonus of nine months. That was before the Bonus Act. But the workers demanded ten months' bonus on a threat of strike — understandably because the company's earnings kept going up every year. The threatened strike had to be averted, but the ante was too high. The top management went into a huddle. The Managing Director finally pronounced. The additional month's bonus would be paid, so the record of industrial peace was not broken. The consumer would pay more for the product. He has to if he wants their products. If this manufacturer had a competitor — that is to say the consumer had another choice — the story would have been different.

Whenever somebody sings paeans of praise about the cradle-to-grave welfarism of a company in our country, I have a wholesome suspicion that the consumer is the fellow who takes the rap. He is the fall guy. Usually the products of this company are in a monopoly position. Take synthetic yarn for instance. All of us know that this industry yielded some of the highest corporate profits, and that some big houses went into shipping and aviation, on the shoulders of the nylon consumer.

There is in our country the classic situation, where the manufacturer has a closed market; where the government greedy for taxes has granted tariff and other protection to monopoly producers; where the trade unions have, on their militant strength, wrested their share of the plunder in high wages and fringe-benefits and where the shareholder is next only to the consumer in being totally ignored. It is no wonder therefore, that the consumer is dethroned and dispossessed. One can multiply instan-

ces where the producer, the government and the trade unions have acted in league to give the rawest of deals to the consumer in terms of quality and price.

The Indian automobile, belonging still to the fifties in features and design, is an outstanding example of the total relegation of the consumer's views and interests to the lowest ever position in the production and distribution sequence.

This sequence to which I refer usually works like this and I quote J. K. Galbraith: "In virtually all economic analyses and instruction, the initiative is assumed to lie with the consumer. In response to wants that originate within himself or which are given to him by his environment, he buys goods or services in the market. The opportunities to make more or less money are the message of the market to producing firms. They respond to this message of the market and thus, ultimately, to the instructions of the consumer. The flow of instruction is in one direction, from the consumer to the market to the producer. All this is affirmed, not inappropriately by terminology that implies all power lies with the consumer. This is called Consumer Sovereignty. The unidirectional flow of instruction from consumer to market to producer may be denoted as the accepted sequence." In the Indian context this sequence has ceased long ago to operate as under the controlled and regulated system, producers are shielded from the cold winds of competition and assured of a captive and defenceless market.

The consumer is compelled to pay the price demanded by the producer and accept without question, the quality that is offered. It is common experience for many of us that the price of a locally manufactured product is as high or sometimes even higher than an identical imported product on which you pay a customs duty of anything between 50% and 120%. One may find many explanations for this phenomenon, but what I wish to point out is that the Indian consumer does not get value for money in such cases. Incidentally this also explains the large-scale smuggling of consumer goods.

To make matters worse, a notion is sought to be assiduously fostered that it is a sin to demand value for money where the so-called luxury items are concerned or that the man who buys a fridge or a TV or a car can be legitimately charged two or three times its "intrinsic" worth. Excise duties are no doubt well-accepted fiscal tools in the hands of the Government, but when they become a share of the spoil from the well-to-do consumer, they lose all their legitimacy. They become oppressive and amount to legalised plunder. The producers are not slow to follow this example when they attach the price-tag to their products. Multit-the-buyer is the well accepted slogan.

Is it not a travesty that a well known Indian refrigerator sells in Moscow at 1/3 the price the consumer in India pays for it? I am told by people

more knowledgeable than I that the tax content in an Indian fridge at various stages of its manufacture, including excise and sales tax on components is about 800%! The price of petrol is another example where the tax element is nearly 300% of the production cost. *Whether it is an air-ticket or the price of a car, it is the supposed capacity of the buyer to pay and not the value of the product or the service that determines the price in this country.* I have always felt that this is an invidious approach to pricing, and totally unfair to the consumer. For this reprehensible practice, nobody is more guilty than our government.

In the industrialised societies of the West, under the so-called market economy system, the consumer-market-producer sequence held, until sellers learned to reverse the sequence by manipulating the consumer. The effect of this reversal is to shift the locus of decision in the purchase of goods from the consumer where it is beyond control to the firm where it is subject to control.

In the words of Galbraith; "The control and management of demand is, in fact, a vast and rapidly growing industry in itself. It embraces a huge network of communications, a great array of merchandising industry, numerous ancillary research, training and other related services and much more. In every day parlance this great machine and the demanding and varied talents that it employs, are said to be engaged in selling goods. In less ambiguous language it means, that it is engaged in the management of those who buy goods."

The enormous transformation and multiplication of human wants has rendered the process of choice

by the consumer so difficult that he can no longer make a rational choice. It is therefore necessary to help the consumer make his choice and protect him against the many hazards of uninformed selection. This however cannot be left exclusively or even largely to the self-regulating practices of business. An alliance between consumer organisations and government must continuously monitor producer practices and ensure that the consumer is protected against abuses, fraud and deceit and from dangers arising from the voluntary use of product or service. Adequate information including the basic issue of what the consumer needs to know to make a rational choice must be continuously disseminated.

Unfortunately consumer activists and organisations in this country have their attention focussed somewhat exclusively on areas of obvious consumer exploitation such as adulteration and short-weighting. There is hardly any attempt to locate latent and less discernible areas of consumer exploitation.

One of the most common sales gimmicks is the coupled selling of two products — both not selling so well for their respective manufacturers. The offer of a marginal reduction of price finds assured buyers who do not have the choice of purchasing either product at the reduced price.

Another area of blatant consumer defrauding is the total disregard of warranty obligations by producers. The individual buyer has not the resources to force a recalcitrant manufacturer to comply with warranty obligations and the result is that producers make all warranties a dead letter with impunity. A strong consumer lobby could make the Govern-

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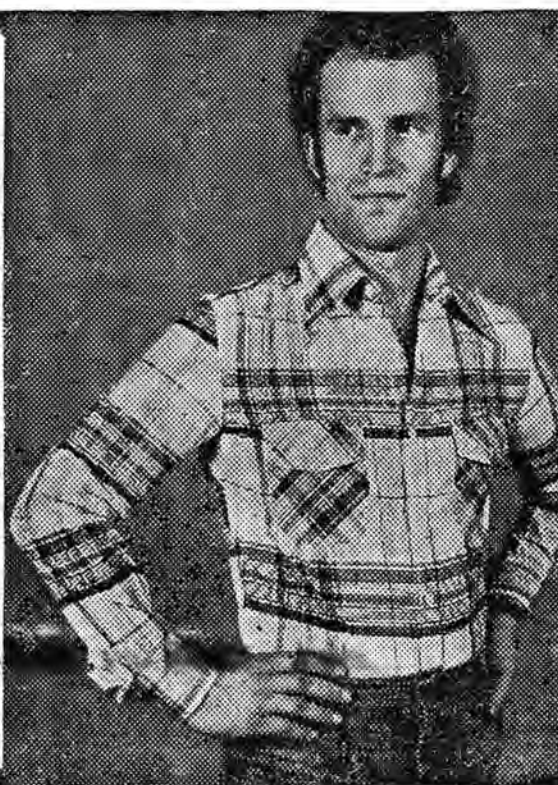
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ment enact legislation rendering warranty non-performance an offence and punishment suitably deterrent.

Yet another notable feature of the Indian consumer scene is the exaggerated and false claims made on behalf of a product.

From the somewhat naive assurance that if you use a particular brand of butter, you become healthy and wealthy — an advertisement you are familiar with — to the hope held out of eternal youth by a drug manufacturer, there is a wide variety of misrepresentations in the advertisement spectrum. In certain Western countries there are operative laws requiring truthfulness in advertisement, but here in India the local Madison Avenue geniuses are vying with each other in the fabrication of plausible half truths to boost sales of products. Here too the Government's professed concern for the common man is yet to manifest itself in tangible action to protect the consumer.

In post-industrial societies, consumer self-reliance is obsolescent, if not obsolete. Corporate social responsibility and legal accountability are accepted concepts. In the international market place buyers of goods, other than individual consumers, have always had some protection through fool-proof contractual arrangements and business practices. This kind of protection is now being extended to the individual consumer and business practices have undergone substantial changes in favour of the consumer.

The fundamental rights of the American consumer have been enumerated by a Presidential Commission as under:-

1. The rights to safety to be protected against the marketing of goods which are hazardous to health or life.
2. The right to be informed, to be protected against fraudulent deceitful or grossly mislead-

ing information, advertising, labelling or other practices and to be given the facts needed to make an informed choice.

3. The right to choose, to be assured, wherever possible, access to a variety of services at competitive prices and in those industries where competition is not possible and government regulations are substituted, to be assured quality at fair prices.

Other consumer protection methods cover pricing policies, selling practices, lending practices, sales premium schemes, warranty and service, product safety, health, producer liability and related issues. Also they demand safeguards against air pollution, water pollution, thermal discharges, noise pollution, radiation, solid wastes, visual despoilation, recreational safeguards, wild life and natural terrain conservation etc. The broadened concept of consumer rights covers not only goods and services, but also environmental conditions bearing on the quality of life.

Unfortunately for us in this country, while our sights are set on the moon for landing a craft, our concern for the consumer is rudimentary. To that extent our sociology has failed to keep pace with our technology in making us a modern nation. While the country looks hopefully for a Neil Armstrong, there is as yet no search for a Ralph Nader, the great consumer advocate whose crusading spirit has done so much for the American consumer.

In fact we need many Ralph Naders in our country, where the average citizen is a victim of all kinds of abuses at the hands of business, statutory bodies and government, and where the age-old fatalism inhibits the growth of consumer awareness. If the nascent instincts of consumerism are consolidated and institutionalised, it will have a very great impact as a major institutional force on both business and politics in this country.

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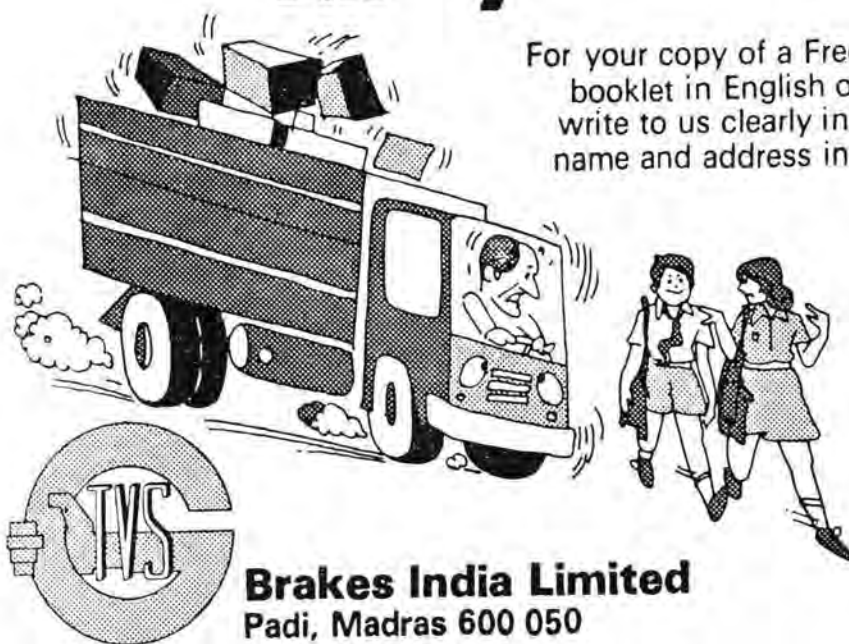


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Book Review

PLANNING FOR A FUTURELESS ECONOMY

by P. R. Brahmananda, Himalaya Publishing House, Bombay, 54; 1978, pp. 214, Rs. 35.

Here is a book that shows how "a Plan is no better than staging the Ramayana without Rama unless it has an appropriate policy frame and the policy has clearly specified and acceptable goals to be pursued". It is gratifying to note that in the midst of the madness of our selfish big-mouthed politicians and the regionalism and ignorance of those who elect them, we have economists like Prof. C. N. Vakil and Prof. P. R. Brahmananda who are able to think honestly and courageously.

This book is meant to show what is wrong with our Plans and how we have been creating an economy without a future. The author, like Prof. C. N. Vakil earlier, stands for a 'wage-goods' strategy of development. He tries to explode the myth behind the new Planning Commission's claim that by the end of 1982-83 about 50 million new jobs will be created and acute poverty as we know it today will end. The wage-goods modelists like the author have always held that neither unemployment nor poverty can be redeemed through the Mahalanobis strategy of the Planners. They also predicted or foresaw the emergence of a severe and prolonged inflation that will follow the Mahalanobis strategy.

In this book we have guidance on many unsolved problems of today. One such problem is whether our talk of democracy and liberty and the avoidance of compulsion can solve the twin dangers of mass poverty and uncontrolled population growth. Problems like these will not be solved unless our mad-hatters in power stop thinking in terms of cloudy idealism and take to practical attitudes in view of the sentence of death our country is really facing. The guidance here is useful but will be lost if our policy-makers, specially of the Janata variety, do not know at least enough English to read such valuable material as this. This point is relevant for it is impossible to get good material like this translated in even 20 of our basic languages out of the 1,652 'mother-tongues' which the Census of India of 1961 has mentioned.

The author shows how our population growth is so high that a reduction in population *alone* can facilitate growth and increase both employment and production. If we do not have radical population control *now* we cannot escape reaching a *stationary state in commodity production* and the entire economy will become non-viable. Prof. Brahmananda is sure our economy cannot go on "expanding production unlimitedly." He dismisses straightaway the output projections of most of the authorities like the Planning Commission and the Ford Foundation. He has adduced evidence to show that diminishing returns are accruing today in our economy. There is a rising tendency in capital-output ratio and "there is direct relation between the capital-ratio and the

stock of capital". A stationary state in commodity production will be reached at the current pace of capital accumulation within 10 or 15 years.

Though one appreciates the courage and much of the clarity in thinking shown in the book, it is not possible to agree with everything that the author has to say. For example in comparing the progress in China with what we have to our credit, the author's praise of China ignores the consequences of China's neglect of the West — a neglect for which she has to make up today by her equally wrong swing to the other extreme. India's position is in many ways unique, and it is unjust to compare our shortcomings with achievements of countries that have shown no respect whatsoever for individual right to life itself. Perhaps some of the author's criticism of our Planners also may not be justifiable. If our Planners have laid down objectives like rural road development, rural electrification and supply of good drinking water as necessary, is it proper to ask, as the author does, what steps have been taken to prevent benefits from these also going to the high income groups? The State gets its funds also from the rich and no good policy can divide society into water-tight compartments of the rich and poor. The author seems to have erred seriously in criticising a measure like the development of rural roads. His query — "how does the development of rural roads specially benefit the rural poor unless they are predominantly those who have to travel or have goods to transport" does not appear to be a properly thought out objection.

Notwithstanding some defective approaches of the type referred to above, this book is vitally important and the criticism in most matters is both fair and startling. There is a good case here for a serious reconsideration of many mistakes made in the past. Those who ignore the book and the case it makes out cannot be reckoned as people who want to help the country.

Prof. Pestonji N. Driver

SPHINX AND COMMISSAR: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East, by Mohamed Heikal: Collins, London £6.95.

How many among the older generation would recall the high drama over the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956? Gamel Abdel Nasser of Egypt had, on the refusal of the United States to help finance the High Dam at Aswan, decided to nationalise the Canal and build the High Dam out of the revenues of the Canal. The decision stunned all Europe. I was then India's Consul General at Geneva and had close contacts with many of the British and French residents settled in and around Geneva. At a dinner party given by a British businessman who had long associations with India, I heard confident predictions that "this upstart Colonel Nasser" will be taught a lesson soon and the Canal retaken. And this was exactly what Britain's Anthony Eden was planning to do in collaboration with the French and the Israelis.

But when the plan was put into operation, the conspirators had to face opposition from an unexpected quarter—Russia—which threatened to launch a rocket attack to defend the Canal. For a moment the World seemed to be on the brink of a wider conflict, if not another World War. Even the stolid Swiss were jittery and wild rumours were afloat in Geneva. Fortunately, Eisenhower's stern displeasure over the Anglo-French adventurism turned the table in favour of the withdrawal of the invading forces from the Canal area and the World heaved a sigh of relief. The Russians had played their cards close to the chest; not even telling the Egyptians of their intentions. When the dust settled down after the crisis, they had established themselves as the closest friends of the Arabs.

In the book under review, Mohamed Heikal (who needs no introduction to the Indian reading public) gives the inside story of the way in which Soviet influence in Egypt and some of the major Arab States grew and flourished for about two decades, from 1955 to 1975, with many ups and downs of course, but only to fade away, particularly in Egypt, in 1977. One could not think of another author more competent to undertake such a study than Mohamed Heikal who, apart from being a journalist of international repute and Editor for many years of the influential *Al Ahrām* of Cairo, had served as a special emissary of Nasser on many occasions and had held the posts of the Minister of Information as well as of the Foreign Minister of Egypt. He was known to have had close and friendly relations with many of the Russian leaders.

Ironical as it would seem, it was John Foster Dulles' move to set up a Defensive Pact against the Soviet Union in the Middle East, initially known as the Baghdad Pact, that drove some of the nationalist Arab leaders into the arms of the Russians. Nasser was opposed to such Pacts and his retort to Dulles: "the Soviet Union never occupied our country; it has no imperial past in the Middle East" could not have gone unheeded in Moscow. Soon after, in April 1955, Nasser went to Bandung when the Afro-Asian solidarity movement was born. The setting was propitious for the entry of the Russians in the Middle East.

We have already seen how the Soviet Union bailed out Egypt during the Suez Crisis of 1956. Then followed the building of the High Dam at Aswan with Russian assistance. Nasser himself visited the U.S.S.R. in April 1958 and received a welcome never before given to a leader from the Third World. Nasser returned the compliment by inviting Khrushchev to visit Egypt for the inauguration of the First Phase of the High Dam in May 1964. Khrushchev wept with joy when he saw the vast crowds which had turned out to receive him on arrival in Cairo. He bestowed the Order of Lenin and the title of Hero of the Soviet Union on Nasser and Field-Marshal Amer and gave a credit of 250 million roubles to Egypt for industrial development.

But the Egyptians could not bask in the sunshine of Khrushchevian benevolence for long. Four months later, on October 15, Khrushchev was ousted from

power, and among the reasons attributed for his fall was his unprecedented munificence at Cairo. Of course, the Triumvirate which succeeded him (Brezhnev, Kosygin and Podgorny) missed no opportunity to assure the Egyptians that nothing had changed and that everything would be the same as in Khrushchev's days, but the Egyptians did not get the same feeling. Nasser himself got embroiled in a disastrous civilwar in Yemen which brought him into conflict with Saudi Arabia and drained the precious resources he had earmarked for economic development. Then came the calamitous 6-day war in June 1967 with Israel which resulted in the virtual destruction of the Egyptian air and land forces. Nasser never recovered from the shock of this defeat and was to disappear from the scene after a brief illness in September 1970.

The following 6 years were to see the gradual deterioration in Russo-Egyptian relations which culminated in the almost complete elimination of Russian influence in the Middle East. One cannot blame either Anwar Sadat, Nasser's successor in office, or the Russian leaders for this unexpected development. Indeed both sides tried their best to reverse the trend, but without success. After the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973, when thanks to the massive Russian support the Egyptians were able to retrieve some honour and morale, we find Anwar Sadat turning to the Americans for help in reaching a settlement with the Israelis. Kissinger himself comes to Cairo on November 6, and has a long *tete a tete* with Sadat. The "common strategy" they agreed on was to get rid of the Russians from the Middle East! The breaking point with the Russians occurred in May 1976, when Sadat announced that he was abrogating the 15-year Treaty of Friendship which he himself had initiated and signed with the Russians only four years before. It must have been a bitter pill indeed for a Super Power to swallow, after having befriended Egypt through thick and thin and showered on it economic aid and arms on an unprecedented scale for twenty years.

There is a brief post-mortem where all the plausible causes for the Russian debacle find a place. It is clear that Sadat had plumped for American intervention and arms, since he sincerely felt that it was the only way to ensure peace between Egypt and Israel.

Very rarely does one come across an outstanding book like this, written with such objectivity and meticulous care for details. Heikal regales his readers with many anecdotes and observations about the persons with whom he comes into contact. His recollections about Khrushchev with whom he had spent many days both before and during the latter's historic visit to Egypt are most revealing. He gives *in extenso* a set of rules of conduct—"Dos and Don'ts"—which Nasser had compiled on the conclusion of Khrushchev's visit for the use of his colleagues in the Arab world. If his successor or any of the other Arab leaders who survived Nasser had paid heed to these guidelines, the course of events in the Middle East might have been different.

K. V. Padmanabhan

On Slogans

A first-rate slogan is potent indeed when properly contrived. It becomes as easy to remember as it is hard to forget. It plants itself in the consciousness by rhythm, rhyme, pith or brevity. Once there, it works not only by whatever imagery it carries but — more — by the latent emotions it mobilizes. It plays too on the verities and prejudices of its audience, balming or inflaming them according to purpose. Just so, the slogan lurks as a sort of floating hook in the psyche. Properly tugged, it can impel people to coalesce, to divide, to fight, to sacrifice, to vote, to buy.

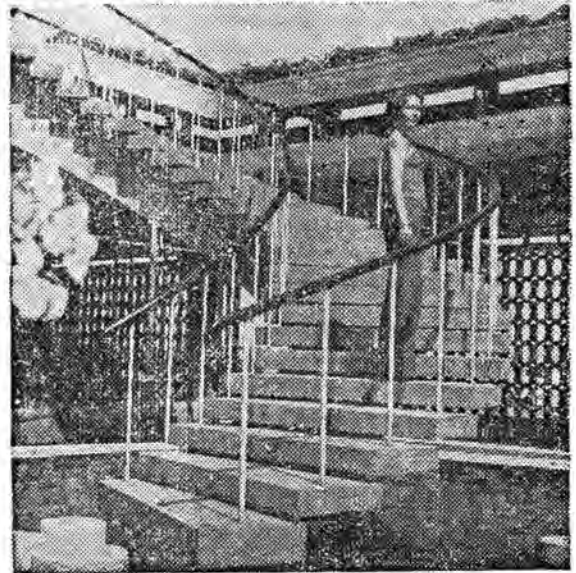
The history of the U.S. can plausibly be capsuled in a litany of slogans. No taxation without representation. Give me liberty or give me death. Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes. Let the people rule. Horace Greeley's popularization of "go West, young man" not only helped inspire California-bound migration but even today conjures up appealing images. "Speak softly and carry a big stick" brings back the vanished world of Theodore Roosevelt's America. Modern America? The war to end wars. A chicken in every pot. We have nothing to fear but fear itself. Remember Pearl Harbor. We shall overcome. Hell no, we won't go. Whip inflation now.

Anyone can confirm the sticking power of business's best slogans simply by scavenging around in the mind. Does she or doesn't she? Even your best friends won't tell you. Ask the man who owns one. Say it with flowers. Up, up and away. Fly now, pay later. Your're in safe hands. Plop, plop, fizz, fizz. Good to the last drop. The high-priced spread. Tastes good like a cigarette should. Leave the driving to us. I'd rather fight than switch. When it rains, it pours. We try harder. It floats. A diamond is forever."

Is it conceivable that just as an oversupply of money drives down the value of currency, an excess of sloganizing diminishes the catchiness of catchwords and the public's vulnerability to their magic? Who could dare say for sure? Yet the theory offers at least one hope of an eventual recovery."

Time, February 12, 1979

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—Tennyson

Elections are the heartbeats of democracy. If they happen too fast, or too irregularly, democracies seize up.
The Economist, July 21

A Prime Minister's job is to overcome prejudice, not pander to it.
The Economist, July 14

Societies may not always get the leadership they deserve and need, but they get a leadership that reflects the nature of the nation's power and the condition of its followers.
Time, August 6

I like Mr. Carter. I respect him. But in all honesty, when he walks into a room, it doesn't light up.
Benjamin Hooks, Executive Director, NAACP,
Time, August 6

It is one of the perversities of Americans that they always want what they do not have; a moral President when they have an immoral one; a cunningly, enthusiastically and effectively amoral President when they have a moral one.
Time, August 6

The question is not whether leadership is obsolete but whether democracy is governable.
Time, August 6

The greatest contribution to civilization in this century may well be air-conditioning — and America leads the way.
Time, August 13

How to avoid nuclear war without succumbing to nuclear blackmail — this is the overwhelming problem of our period. Henry Kissinger, *Time*, August 13

In the land of the vague, the clear eyed marxist is king.
The Economist, August 4

I am not bulliable.
Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, *Time*, August 13

The red carpet used to greet VIPs at Lusaka International Airport was made in the hated land of apartheid; many of the delicacies served at the Commonwealth banquets also came from there.
Time, August 13

The State takes too much of the nation's income, its share must be steadily reduced.
Conservative Party's manifesto,
The Daily Telegraph, July 23

When Mr. Helmut Schmidt telephones President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, they talk English. When Belgian admirals give orders to a mixed Flemish — Walloon crew, they shout in English. When EEC prime ministers meet after dinners at summits, they chat in English.
The Economist, July 21

Today our dilemma is that we either hand the Government over to louts or watch them paralyse the Parliament.

Arun Shourie, *Indian Express*, July 19

The British trade union movement holds a position of power and privilege which is unsurpassed by any of its counterparts in the free world.

Mr. Walter Goldsmith, Director General,
The Institute of Directors,
The Daily Telegraph, July 20

How strange it is that the progressive conscience should be strongly in favour of abortion, which involves destroying the unborn who have done no harm to anybody, and strongly against capital punishment, which involves killing murderers and terrorists.
Sunday Telegraph, July 15

The measure of achievement



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- The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry 1972 Award for pioneering export achievement.
- The Government of India Award for outstanding achievement in export promotion for 1972-73.
- The Government of Maharashtra Directorate of Industries Prize for best export performance for 1973-74.
- The Texprocil Award for outstanding export performance in 1976-77.

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