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"THE woman amazes me," said the smart young secretary indignantly, looking up from her paper, as she stood third from the head of the queue at the bus-terminus. "She takes us, the ordinary people, to be complete fools." "Well, aren't we?" asked the thin, bespectacled economic journalist from his place two below her. "If we weren't, would she be in power? It's not much use making indignant remarks now, when we've established her where she is. But anyhow what occasions your latest outburst?" "She has the colossal impudence to complain bitterly that the Opposition parties do not co-operate with her; the country has tremendous problems facing it, she laments, and the Opposition thinks only of confrontation. Poor, poor woman, she offers them the hand of friendship and all she gets in return is cold contempt" said the secretary biting.

"I presume by the hand of friendship she means issuing more than half-a-dozen ordinances in the weeks immediately preceding the meeting of Parliament. And of course, the National Security Ordinance, could there be a greater gesture of friendship than that? What did she want the Opposition to do, pass a unanimous resolution of humble thanks to her for it! Her own Home Minister admitted that the act embodying it was another name for the much-dreaded Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) of the Emergency days, under the provisions of which she and her myrmidons wreaked much havoc upon large numbers of innocent, people in the period '75-77. And she brings it back again, and expects the Opposition and all of us, ordinary citizens, to welcome it! I agree she must think we're utter fools," said the middle-aged, pleasant-faced lady political scientist from her place next below the economic journalist.

"Don't forget she got quite good majorities for it in both houses of Parliament, her own party people mostly, of course, but even they, knowing the past, would, I should have thought, been more wary of it. Yet not a voice from among them protested. She probably is more correct in her judgment of what we Indians will bear than any of us, I am afraid," said a handsome young lady in a kaftan and embroidered slippers. "I have often thought we are like the lotos-eaters of Tennyson, who having partaken of the drug, forgot the past completely and just desired to rest. To us, she offers the drug of her success at the elections, of her promises of achievement in the future, and we forget not only her evil doings during the Emergency, but even the fact that she has failed to do in her

present year of office, what she said she would, immediately before coming to office. Not only have we not the memory of the elephant, we lack even the remembrance of the sparrow. We are really a feckless people, living only for the day and hoping always for the best. Perhaps it is just as well we are, otherwise how could we even carry on, considering our own condition and the sort of rulers to whom we have generally entrusted our affairs."

"Come, come, it does not do to repine too much", said the economic journalist. "By now those of us who think know quite well that when she calls for cooperation, it is only a gimmick. She does not want that, all she wants is implicit obedience to her will. When she makes these complaints, she is only putting up excuses in advance for the regressive action she is proposing to take. 'What could I do, they just wouldn't co-operate, despite all my efforts and calls to them' kind of thing. That she should lie, that she should practise deceit, must be regarded as part of the normal order of things. We have known her too long, seen her in action for a sufficient time, to doubt that. Unfortunately the unthinking part of our people do not see that, and take what she says at face-value. There are also others, those who know her as she is, but wilfully neglect to recognise the fact because it makes them uncomfortable, and those who have their present and future so tied with hers that they enthusiastically support all she says and does. They are what may be called interested advocates. Our task is to lay the position clearly before the people, point out the dangers of the situation, warn that she is aiming straight at absolute power and detail the steps she has already taken towards it. The rest is in the hands of Providence. The people may awaken in time; her knavish tricks may be frustrated. On the other hand, she may continue on her decided course, with the blessings and support of the unknowing or unbelieving people, and we instead of being free citizens, may be rendered the subjects of an absolute dictatorship. Consider what our lot would have been had we been born in the Soviet Union, in East Germany or indeed in any other dictatorship, Communist or otherwise, with our present cast of mind. Prison-camps, Psychiatric clinics, the Gulag Archipelago or worse would have been our fate. By the mercy of Providence we escaped these, having been born in free India. Clearly then we must endeavour with all our might to see that it remains free India, that by no subterfuge or plan our liberty is eaten up. Should Providence adjudge our efforts not sufficient, should it find us lacking in will or in work, it may well decide against us and give the victory to dictatorship. I have taken a good deal of your time, but you may be sure I will not intervene again".

"What you have said is certainly most valuable", said a man in a long black coat and a black cap. "Perhaps part of the answer to this apprehension of Indira's dictatorship has already begun to appear. I refer to the recent very successful session of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Bombay. The sentiments they expressed in favour of liberty, democracy, civil rights, freedom of the press, etc. were unexceptionable, and there

is no reason to doubt that they were sincerely held. Is it not meet then that they should be strengthened and supported? Some people say they are a Hindu party. All right, I say, Hindus are eighty-five per cent of the population, why should there not be a Hindu party? Some people say, but such a party will be very intolerant. I say, who framed our constitution, liberal, democratic, egalitarian, secular. Were not ninety percent of them Hindus? No, there is nothing to be afraid of, even if they are a Hindu party, and in fact they don't claim to be that." "I would agree with you entirely", said a white-haired, luxuriously-moustached, khadi-clad old gentleman, leaning upon a battered umbrella, "were I sure the BJP is a truly independent party, I am afraid it is not. Behind it stands the RSS. It is, in fact, however much its stalwarts and office-bearers might deny it, the political wing of the RSS. Now the RSS is not a democratic organisation, it is authoritarian in essence; full of good works on occasion, but still authoritarian. Naturally then however much the leaders of the BJP, the Vajpayees, the Jethmalanis, the Advanis, and the rest may be against Indira, the dictator-in-process, one cannot postulate the same opposition from the authoritarian RSS; 'a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind'. And in the last resort, the RSS has the final say over the BJP. If Deoras of the RSS and Indira agree on a certain line, however much the BJP may rave and protest, in the end it will have to follow Deoras. About turn my lords, and march, the Duke of Wellington is supposed to have said to his party in the Lords, when he had decided on a complete change of policy, and the reluctant lords who upto then had been entirely opposed to the view the Duke was now for, turned about and marched into the lobby the Duke indicated. Such too would be the case of the BJP, if Deoras cracked the whip. Nor is this illusory. The Janata was broken up, because there was an understanding between Indira and Deoras. The Jana Sangh then was helpless, the BJP now would be equally helpless. Indira repaid Deoras in part by not attacking the RSS or Jana Sangh by word or deed during all the period from the break-up of the Janata till very recently, when she had to reply to correspondents' questions about the BJP sessions in Bombay. So you see to rely upon the BJP to stand out against Indira the dictator is to rely upon a very uncertain factor. The BJP leaders and even many of the BJP followers might be quite sincerely opposed to dictatorship and Indira in that role, but neither they nor any one else can be quite sure about the Deoras line at the appropriate moment."

"There's a good deal in what you say", said the lady political scientist. "Now, since there's no sign of the bus as yet, let me turn to another subject, the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, which Indira and several of the other non-aligned leaders have been plugging so assiduously. Frankly I think it's quite impossible. Russia has her over ten-year old colony in Aden, with all facilities for her warships etc. She has bases in Angola and in the Horn of Africa. She is in illegal occupation of Afghanistan, having invaded it. She is Iran's neighbour on the north, and has several divisions on that border. The oil from the Gulf, the

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Western nations, Japan and we among others cannot do without. Clearly then it is in all our interests, if somebody sets up countervailing forces to make sure that the oil keeps on flowing. A zone of peace might be a possibility if Russia could be prevailed upon to give up Aden, withdraw from Afghanistan and the Persian border and dismantle its other bases in Africa. Then with reason, the Americans and other Western nations could be asked to withdraw their forces. As it is, for our safety just as much as for their own sake, the present arrangement cannot but continue. To maintain peace, prepare for war, is an old saying, but a true one even today. As Lee Kuan Yoo of Singapore said once, 'all right, the Americans withdraw their fleet from the Indian Ocean. A Russian battle-fleet drops anchor outside Singapore. The admiral sends for me and says to ~~me~~ you are now under the protection of the great Soviet Union. You will do what I say; understand? What do I do, except nod my head and bow low. So please don't be foolish. There is safety in balance.'

"I am inclined to agree," said a scholarly type in a black jacket and white trouser. "A zone of peace would be all right if the United Nations had sufficiently strong forces to maintain it. As at present it is quite impracticable. Even assuming you could persuade the Americans and Russians to withdraw from the Ocean, what is there to prevent Iran or Indonesia or China from building up a strong fleet of surface-vessels and submarines and dominating the area? Then there are Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates, wouldn't these in combination, with skill from the first and money from the second, soon be a threat at least in the Arabian Sea? Would we not have to spend a great deal more on our Navy and Air forces to counter that? You may say, but all these littoral countries would have agreed to the zone of peace, so there could be no danger of their misbehaviour. Since when, once there is no power to enforce good behavior, have nations abstained from doing what they think is best in their own interest? I would say to Indira and all the heads of state meeting in Ceylon later this year, pass any beautiful resolutions you like, but remember that's all they are, beautiful resolutions, but not operable in practice. Aspiration is perhaps good for its own sake, so go on aspiring and leave it at that." By this time, the bus could be seen coming up, and conversation ceased, each member of the queue turning his or her attention to his or her own affairs.

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