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# OPINION

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## THE PUBLIC VOICE

"I think", said the middle-aged, pleasant-faced political scientist, looking up from her morning paper as she stood third in the queue at the bus terminus, "everybody in the least interested in politics must by now beware that, whatever the statements she pours out, Indira's real game is dictatorship, absolute power for herself, all authority centred in her. The question now is no longer democracy or dictatorship for Indira. The question has changed to Indira's dictatorship, do you approve it or not? A remarkable number of people do. What do you say?" and she turned to the smart young secretary with the very impressive brief-case, who stood two below her in the queue. "I say no, very emphatically no. Dictator is bad in any circumstances, though they do say that the best form of government is a benevolent dictator's, none of the delays and mistakes of a democracy and all the responsiveness to the people's right wishes and desires that the best democracy has. However she has neither the ethical nor the mental equipment to be a benevolent dictator. The concept of the public interest is utterly foreign to her. She holds her own personal interest to be the public interest, in fact, subscribes whole-heartedly to the belief that what is good for Indira is good for India and nothing else is. Her distinguishing marks are an inordinate love of power, an inveterate habit of lying and an unscrupulousness beyond belief. I wouldn't trust her with the management of a small company, that is. If I wanted it run honestly and properly. If, of course, I was prepared for false statements, fudged accounts, hanky-panky of every kind, she might be the right choice, though even then I doubt if the business would show a profit, she having managed to take a good deal of the cream away to her own secret coffers", said the secretary.

"Come, come, you are far too severe", said a young man in faded jeans and a dark-blue sweater. "Indira is a politician and she has the politician's diseases, perhaps even in a very exaggerated form, I'll agree. She is corrupt, insincere and lies as no trooper ever could. But when that's been said, the indictment against her must stop. As to her management

abilities she won the Bangla war, so I'll stand for no aspersions on them. In fact, on that ground alone I'd welcome her dictatorship. All right, she herself makes a hundred, the country makes three or five, let us say. But surely that is better than the do-nothings of the other parties, who haven't the initiative to make anything for either themselves or the country. Glory be to Indira I say. Under her there is always likely to be more room for a go. Better, wheeler-dealer like myself, corner-cutter like myself. So onward with Indira to the heights, and if she turns upon one later and gives no reasons, why that's a woman's privilege, and who is more charmingly womanly than herself?"

"The state and scope of our young friend's arguments leaves me somewhat bewildered. I can gather that he agrees Indira is an undesirable person, the sort of woman I suppose he wouldn't like his sister or fiancee to be. But he says the country does better, even though marginally, under her. This I take leave to doubt. She has been in power from January, and the country is worse off than it was even under the lack-lustre minority Charan Singh government, which her great friend, Sanjiva Reddy, had foisted on the country possibly at her suggestion. He then tells that there is more scope for his somewhat peculiar talents of an unscrupulous nature under her and so he is whole-heartedly for her. Nothing could be fairer. Each for himself certainly. But what about the country? Where does it come in? He has, in my view, made out a fair case why Indira should not even be Prime Minister, much less Dictator. But Prime Minister she is, and Dictator she very probably will be, alas", concluded the thin-faced, bespectacled, economic journalist with a sigh, "if I know my countrymen right. One thing however I agree with our young friend about. Her pictures in the papers do show her to be charmingly womanly, and accordingly all the more dangerous, the prudent would observe."

"I don't think we need a dictator. Even now, though this is truly a government of non-performance and much talk, we were better off than we were in the atmosphere of fear and suspicion during the emergency. Then few dared speak, one was always looking over one's shoulder, one never knew when the plain-clothes policeman would ask one to accompany him to the police station, and thence to prison. No, the helplessness that one feels in the presence of arbitrary power only those can understand who have felt its grip, and I tell you there are few things worse than that. If Indira says she cannot govern the country under the ordinary law and therefore wants extraordinary laws. The

proper answer should be to throw her out, not give her powers that will enable her to establish herself as supreme irremovable dictator. She has given herself one of the most effective of such powers by ordinance already. If Parliament, even with a majority of her own party, thinks at all in terms of the national interest, to say nothing of the interests of the members themselves, it will refuse to pass the bill bringing the ordinance on the statute book. If it does not, many *MPs* will have to live in fear and trembling, reliving the experiences of Chavan and Jagjivan Ram during the last days of the emergency, but there is further ground for holding Indira utterly unfit to be a dictator. She follows no principle and is whimsical in her decisions. If for you 'the whole law is what I like', the result cannot be uniformity. I like this on one occasion, that on another. No successful government can be conducted in this way. The result can only be management by sycophancy and quick observance of mood, finally ending in disaster. Since she is Prime Minister, there is nothing more to be said about that, but she needs all the time to be kept on the rails by a strong party organisation and a strong opposition," said handsome young lady in a kaftan and embroidered slippers.

"Whatever you may say or do, there is one thing that must effectively stymie all objections to her as P.M. or as Dictator, which I have no doubt she will in effect make herself by the end of the year. Look up, look down, look east, west, north or south, do you see even a plausible replacement?" asked a thin man in a long black coat and a black cap. "There is none and that is her strength. Morarji now? Hardly practicable; old age, sad record during Janata's two years; harps even now on his son's innocence and urine therapy. Vajpayee? Seemed possible at one time, but then turned out like all the other Jan Sanghis, to be under the RSS thumb, Chandrasekhar? Man not sure of himself from day to day, let alone or his own party. Charan Singh? Bah what a mess! Rajnaraian? Worse. And so on until you've gone through all the politicians. So she's irreplaceable. She knows it, the country knows it, she knows the country knows it. Hence her great confidence, the assurance she has that events wait upon her; she can postpone decisions, not today nor tomorrow but sometime; after all, who else can take decisions but her? The ignorant she knows call this indecision. Let them get what pleasure they can by calling it inaction. They will see in time that action comes at last, and it is firm and as she wanted. The people generally sense this. Hence the favouring of her as dictator, if she wants that. She is a firm, settled figure, the rest are wavering shadows. Can you turn away from her, however much you disapprove of dictatorship in theory, or of her as dictator in practice?"

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OPINION, October 21, 1980

"Specious, I am afraid, very specious, sir", said a luxuriously-moustached, khadi-clothed, white-haired old gentleman, leaning on a battered, old umbrella. "An ethically valueless person does not command acceptance because others who could be considered turn out to be unworthy. Let us get it firmly settled in our minds: To let Indira be Prime Minister was a great mistake on the part of the people of India; to let her make herself Dictator will be an even greater mistake, a crime, in fact. As to replacements, trust in providence. After Nehru who? Agitated busy minds for many a long year. The time arrived and brought in its train, quiet, unassuming Lal Bahadur Shastri. So one thing at a time. Prevent Indira's bid for the dictatorship from succeeding. If in the process she goes, be sure Providence will not forsake us. The time will bring forward the person, and India's democratic Constitution will continue to be respected and followed. Ah, here's our bus." So they got into the bus, their minds gradually turning to the tasks the day would bring them.



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