

Weekly Copy Ps. 5

Annual Subscription Rs. 2

OPINION

Vol. XXII

November 17, 1981

No. 28

THE PUBLIC VOICE

"REAGAN seems to be rather a foolish man," remarked the young secretary with the very impressive brief-case from her place at the head of the queue at the bus-terminus. "Why the qualification?" asked the hatchet-faced, bespectacled economic journalist standing three places below her. "Of course he is a fool. Who but a confounded fool could at this juncture, when Nato policy is to instal cruise and Pershing missiles in the countries of Western Europe to counter the increasing Russian threat from overwhelming conventional forces and nuclear SS-missiles, have talked to newsmen about the possibility of limited nuclear war so that the strategic nuclear weapons of the super-powers need not come into use? Did he think the Europeans had lost their reasoning faculties to such an extent that they would not deduce from this a plan in which they would suffer total destruction while the US and the USSR remained safe, saying no doubt 'very sad, tut, tut.' There couldn't be a better way of turning many Europeans into opponents of the Nato plan. If he had been a secret agent of the USSR, he could not have done worse." "That's a bit extreme, perhaps," said the middle-aged pleasant-faced political scientist in the green and gold saree, "But I agree with you that it was a most irresponsible thing to say. And he wouldn't leave it alone. Later, while explaining that it was just an off-hand remark, he added but of course it might happen that way. The selection of his cabinet too does not show wisdom. Haig and Wineburger started squabbling almost from the beginning and they continue in the same way still, and to choose as your National Security Adviser a man who takes a thousand dollars from a Japanese journal for securing an interview with the President's wife . . . well, really it is the outside of too much. And the Adviser still remains in office! He hasn't been kicked out the moment the President knew the story. Yes, I'm afraid I must agree; Reagan does seem to be a very foolish man."

"The Americans don't seem to have much luck with many of their recent Presidents. There was Nixon. The name is enough, a synonym for wrong-doing and chicanery. There was Carter, a basically good man, but unfortunately most unlucky. He produced the impression of being unable to get anything done. Even the attempt to get the American diplomats out of Iran by force blew up in his face. And now we have this Reagan. If he doesn't improve as he goes on, it's a sorry prospect for them, to say nothing of the open-society world. Despite

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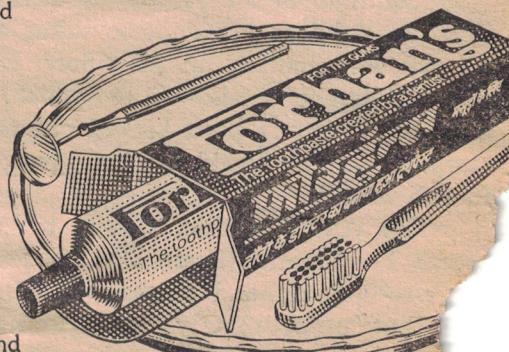
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all the fulminations of Indira, I cannot help feeling that for truly free societies, the proper management of the American Government is a very important matter. Yes alas we free people are all concerned, however much we may dislike it," said the handsome lady in kaftan and embroidered slippers.

"You mentioned Indira. Would you consider her a fool, too?" said a young man in a yellow shirt and tight-fitting blue jeans. "I'll answer that," said the luxuriantly-moustached, white-haired old man in Khadi, leaning on his battered umbrella. "No, I would be a great fool if I thought she was a fool. She is not a fool, she is a knave of the first order, a consummate complete rogue of a kind, which, Thank God the world sees but rarely. She is a very skilled political strategist, an exceptional tactician, a near-perfect manipulator, an arrant liar, a notable hypocrite, to herself the centre of the world, believing firmly that 'what she likes is the whole law,' and that she is fully entitled to act in any way whatsoever to achieve what she wants. She loves power and her aim is to have full and supreme power over every person and every institution in the country. No questioning, no criticism, no disobedience, discipline and unity for all of us behind her. In fact, 'Indira locuta, causa finita.' In the pursuit of her aim, she has made corruption the way of life for the people, and of course for herself. She would have us believe that it is a natural phenomenon, that there is nothing anyone can do against it, that in short it is best to succumb to it and not kick against the pricks. Since we as a people follow the example and adopt the standards of those we consider above us, she has succeeded admirably in getting her way. Often now, it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to carry through an ordinary transaction honestly. 'The blackmarketing princes of tax-evasion' are no longer few and far away. Not only are they to be found in high places, they are all around us, even among people we thought we knew well. She has brought about this social and moral revolution, talking all the time of how her heart bleeds for the poor and underprivileged, and how she thinks day and night of improving their lot."

"I don't think anybody can seriously question your statement. Her conduct during the Emergency and since she came to power last year amply testify to the truth of it by and large," said a man in a long black coat and black velvet cap with a couple of big books below his arm. "Look how she goes round the world, saying especially to the Western powers 'disarm, oh my brethren disarm, beat your swords into ploughshares, and with the money you save, give to the hungry and needy, that is, us.' But does she disarm herself? No she rearms tily, seeing threats all around her. And what if the others she to disarm, also feel threatened and arm, as she says she does, to defend themselves? Are they black scoundrels and she pure driven snow? Long ago an Athenian said 'Co-exist, of course can be better than that? But how does one co-exist with someho does not want one to exist?' The answer is only by being

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stronger than him, or at least so strong that he dare not take the risk of suffering the damage you can inflict on him. The Russian communist State has declared again and again that it wants its system to flourish throughout the world, that history is with it, that it must triumph and that it is its duty to spread its faith by any and every means, practicability being the only restraining factor. In practice too, wherever at all possible, it has carried out its theory. The latest example is Afghanistan, where setting up a puppet regime, it has taken over the country by force of arms. Such brave Afghans, both inside and on the borders, as resist this grave aggression, it calls rebels, and so does Indira who in this matter has from the very beginning adopted the Russian point of view, perhaps from a fellow-feeling or an aspiring desire, for she wishes to be in this country what Stalin was in the USSR, *vozhd*, sole, all-powerful chief. She knows very well that the recent strengthening of forces by the Western powers in the Indian Ocean is largely a reply to the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, but does she say strongly and urgently to the Russians 'get out and help to defuse the situation?' No, she will not do so. She takes refuge in vague phrases like 'a political solution.' It is as if a bully had by force seized your neighbour's house, and you said to your neighbour and his friends, oh, no, no, I won't tell him to go. We must have a political solution. In effect, since the bully is the stronger, whatever he will agree to. Alas, alas, to what depths has India's foreign policy descended under Indira!"

"One point I would make," said the political scientist. "It is not quite right to blame Indira alone for the curse of corruption that flourishes throughout the land so boldly and openly today. Its roots in high quarters were laid by Jawaharlal himself. He refused often to listen to bona fide complaints against high dignitaries like Ministers and Chief Ministers. He would pay no attention to the clear procedure for enquiry in such cases laid out in a Report on Public Administration that had been prepared at his own request and that had been submitted to him in 1951. When I hear all the extolling of Nehru done under official patronage, I feel like adding to the list of his great deeds, the encouragement of corruption by his wilful neglect of clearly.

Ah, the bus arrives, so no more talk till we meet Venkatappiah, afdayang Endowes, the bus discharged the passengers it had brought ni-110 016.

CORRECTION

In the penultimate paragraph of the issue of November tenth, for Noorulamin read Fazlulhaq. The error is greatly regretted.

Posted at Central Packet Sorting Office, Bombay on 17-11-1981
 Regd. No. BYW 69
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Edited and published by A. D. Gorwala at 40C Ridge Road, Bombay 400
 printed by him at the Mouj Printing Bureau, Khatau Wadi, Bombay 400 099
 Proprietor: A. D. Gorwala.