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OPINION

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DRIFT, DELAY, DRIFT

"But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near,
And yonder, all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity."

But of course the egregious Chandrasekhar, the opinionated Charansingh, the complacent Morarji, the guileful Jagjivanram neither hear such disconcerting sounds nor see such disagreeable sights. Having established themselves in their high offices, they are generally well-content. Occasional diversion they seek in faction-fighting, newspaper interviews attacking their colleagues and such other high-spirited activities, but "their ears in heaven, their feet in flowery meads," rarely are they seriously disturbed. Their trust is in time, the great settlor, and so they have evolved the new policy of delay and drift. By delaying they drift and by drifting they delay. And when sometimes unpleasant consequences cannot be prevented from becoming apparent, why just delay a little more, drift for a further while, and even severe critics will seem to become less severe.

A case in point is the organisation of the Janata Party. Fourteen months have passed, but the Party remains the combination of inchoate groups from which it was born. Time and again has attention been drawn to this, it being pointed out that the very base on which further political action can be built is still lacking, that without it Janata supporters are falling away, that the result of such neglect may will be failure in elections. Ah, yes, a bad business, it may even be conceded, but we're doing things about it. Come October and you'll see. And so delay and drift, drift and delay.

The Commission of Enquiry's first report against Bansilal was presented to Government over four months ago. Has anything happened to Bansilal? Nothing so far as is known. Are the mighty four concerned? Obviously not, what does it matter, after all? Some delay, plenty

of drift, it might even settle itself. He did all kind of utterly unconscionable things, real injustices? Well probably he did, but now so much time has elapsed. Let us drift along meanwhile. Yes, yes, action must be taken, will be taken, but immediately? Oh, no, have a heart; in due course, ah yes, that's right, due course, very useful phrase

That Mrs. Gandhi has plenty of resources is clear from her way of living and functioning. In the period since she lost the elections, she has made herself the virtual leader of the Opposition. She is reliably said to have stacked away very large sums on losing power. Unless our secret services have become completely inefficient, or have been completely got at, where the moneys are could have been known by now, provided of course there had been the will and the drive from our four great dignitaries. Clearly they were not particularly concerned. Drifting a lot, delaying a little, and 'is' and 'is not' seem much the same.

The Shah Commission's first report reached the Government two months ago. Had the Mighty four decided then, action could have been initiated in at most two weeks. But no, delay, refer it to fifteen secretaries, who would seem to be in no way better qualified to deal with it than the Law Minister, but who take a further month. A good example of drifting so as not to have to take a decision quickly.

That these four men had the capacity to reach decisions forthrightly and speedily cannot be doubted. They may still have the capacity. All that can be said is they do not now seem to exercise it. So they do great harm to the country, particularly making it easier for our ex-tyrant Indira to be tyrant again. Their task is not just to govern the country well—which, in any case, they cannot do by drift and delay—but to prevent Indira from taking over the government. This they cannot succeed in unless they get over their penchant for in-fighting, decide quickly and firmly, see that their decisions are implemented, give up the feeling of 'I'm all right, Jack, and so's the world really, whatever the appearances', which seems of late to have affected them intensely.

It has been suggested that these men should go. Considering them on their present record and the unlikelihood of their being able to give up their extremely comfortable 'delay and drift' policy, one would be inclined to agree, were it not for the uncomfortable feeling that one could go further and fare worse. So keep them on and watch them carefully and closely. They must be seen to have their feet on the ground, their heads out of the clouds. They must be made to see things and people as they are and not in the light of their predilections and prejudices. They must recognise the great role of ordinary common-sense in administration and Government. They must cease to be bemused by our ex-tyrant, and learn to regard her as just another wrong-doer, who must pay for her misdeeds. If these can be done, they will still be useful to the nation. If not, a long farewell to them, to all four of them. Let us sweep the house clean once we begin sweeping.

BUREAUCRACY

The other day, one section of Government servants used 'Bureaucracy' as a term of opprobrium in referring to another section. So the following:

The word 'Bureaucracy' has no special derogatory significance in the public mind. Contempt is not implied, for instance, in the phrase, 'the British, or German, Bureaucracy'. When, however, mention is made not of 'bureaucracy,' but of 'bureaucrat', and even more of 'bureaucratic,' as in 'bureaucratic behaviour' or 'the bureaucratic spirit,' the connotation is undoubtedly pejorative. A bureaucrat in the public mind is not just a member of the Bureaucracy but a special type of member, infected in fact with one or more of what are called the maladies of bureaucracy. These maladies form, so to speak, the occupational diseases from which the official, public or private, is more apt to suffer than men of other occupations.

The best known of these number six. An excessive sense of self-importance or an undue sense of the importance of his office bedevils many a true bureaucrat. He is also apt to be indifferent towards the feeling or inconveniences of individual citizens. Often he is obsessed with the binding or inflexible authority of departmental decisions, precedents, arrangements or forms, regardless of how badly or with what injustice they work in particular cases. His respect for regulations and formal procedure rises sometimes to a mania. Pre-occupied with the activities of particular units of administration he is unable to consider the Government as a whole. Not least of all, he fails to recognise the relation between the governors and the governed as an essential part of the democratic process. Of the culprit who allows himself to be swayed by some or all of these diseases, the poet says:

His ears are deaf to reason,
His lips are loud in broil.
He knows no use for power
Except to show his might;
He gives no heed to judgement
Unless it proves him right.

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