ESTABLISHED 1838

A Thought for The Week

A monarchy is a merchantman, which sails well, but will sometimes strike on a rock and go to the bottom; whilst a republic is a raft, which would never sink, but then your feet are always in water.

— FISHER AMES

The President Of India

Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. In India we abolished the crown in 1950 when we gave ourselves a constitution and declared ourselves a republic. But we retained the head without the crown—and called him President. And we said that he shall have the same functions (ceremonial) and powers (none) which the British monarch enjoys at great cost to the British public exchequer. We did not give him a salary comparable to the British monarch's (how could we as a nation committed to the virtues of austerity in high places?) and we did not provide for his brothers, sisters, sons and daughters (how could we as a republic pledged to uphold the noble principle of equality?). But we decided to keep him in the old viceregal palace which is bigger than Buckingham Palace and we let him retain a whole CPWD division to look after his Moghul Gardens, his bodyguards who are as smartly turned out as the palace guards in London, his personal staff, including a military adviser with the rank of a major-general and all the paraphernalia that go with monarchy. So we have had a monarch with all the pomp and pageantry but without the crown which would obviously have been inconsistent with our republican aspirations to which we had pledged ourselves in our struggle for independence.

As if this was not anomalous enough, we have invariably put into Rashtrapati Bhavan men who have had little use for the pageantry of the office and hankered after powers which have not gone with it. The first President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, was a leading politician who made no secret either of his view that the Indian head of state must have more powers than the British monarch or of his differences with the then prime minister. Dr. Prasad was too loyal a colleague to wish to participate in a constitutional crisis and Mr. Nehru too towering a figure to permit him to do any such thing. The second occupant of Rashtrapati Bhavan, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, was an eminent professor who had held a famous chair at Oxford for years. But he is said to have preferred to meet his visitors in his bedroom where he liked to spend most of his time. But when Mr. Nehru's authority shrank with the Chinese attack in 1962, Dr. Radhakrishnan, too, did not hesitate to criticise him in public, though rather obliquely, and to let it be known that in his view he would have made a better Prime Minister. Then we had Dr. Zakir Husain. He filled the role best. He loved the flowers in the Moghul Gardens; he was tailor-made for ceremonial occasions; and he had no political ambition. Mr. Fakhruddin Ahmed too did not entertain any dream of occupying the prime ministerial chair. But otherwise he cut a sorry figure as president. He lacked both the stature and the popular esteem a president is expected to command.

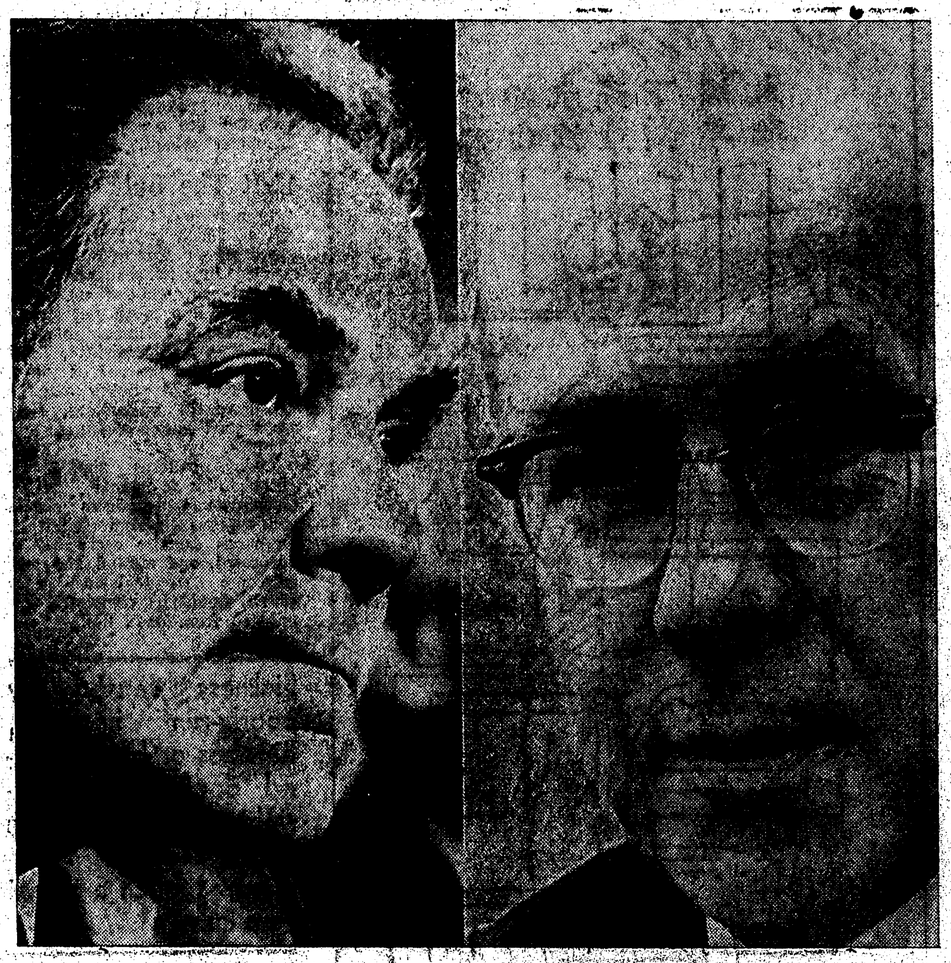
Mr. V. V. Giri had ceased to be an active politician years before he moved into Rashtrapati Bhavan. But he did not recognise this fact and saw himself as a champion of the working class. He was no rubber-stamp president, he told all and sundry. if only they were willing to listen. Mr. Reddy is a politician to his fingertips, to use a cliche, and inevitably tends to behave as one. He came into his own at the time of the fall of the Desai government. It is difficult to say whether he would have liked to impose President's rule on the whole country if there was a constitutional provision for it.

How does one sum up the experience? Perhaps it would be appropriate to say that the equation between the president and the prime minister is more likely to be uneasy and that in the final analysis a great deal depends on the two personalities who occupy the respective chairs. A strong-willed president can have his way if the prime minister is weak and unsure of his position. But a president who is not careful in maintaining the dignity of the office can do a great deal of damage to the institution itself.

Why is Haig out, Shultz in?

Tension had been mounting for weeks inside Washington's "foreign office" — but when it finally erupted in the resignation of the Secretary of State himself, everyone was stunned. How did it happen? And what kind of man is Haig's successor, George Shultz?

Peter Wilsher and Robin Wright in Beirut and Michael Bilton and Mark Hosenball in Washington report.



Haig (left) knew what was being cooked up by Clark, King Fahd and Arafat—and didn't like it even though Reagan himself was behind it. Shultz (right) brings to the job a powerful reputation for integrity and unflappability. His background is almost entirely economic, either academically or government... His last salary was $ 466,000 a year.

ALEXANDER HAIG's last week as US Secretary of State began with two main items on the foreign policy agenda—President Reagan's imminent decision on anti-Soviet trade sanctions, and the ending of Israel's war in Lebanon. Both involved Haig and his cabinet colleagues in furious rows, accusations of all-faith and bungling, and total inability to agree to a consistent line. By Friday tension and mistrust had risen to a point where the man who once declared himself (prematurely) "in charge" decided instead to throw in the towel.

The more important of the two issues, and the source of the final break, was the Middle East.

Last weekend Israeli armies ringed West Beirut, bottling up the last 6,000 hard-core supporters of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and were poised, as they chose, to destroy the city or extract humiliating surrender terms. Yet the PLO leaders appeared calm and unworried, confident that somehow diplomatic means would be found to ensure their survival. And, behind the scenes, diplomacy was indeed proceeding, in high gear.

What the Haig affair now reveals is that in Washington the left hand did not know — or preferred to ignore — what the right hand was doing.

Haig has always been sensitive to slights, as he is alert to protocol. Files are full of anecdotes — battles with Kissinger over the relative distance of their bedrooms from the presidential suite, tantrums over aeroplanes with insufficient windows, as well as the famous occasion, after Reagan's attempted assassination, when he attempted, quite unconstitutionally, to seize the White House controls.

Recently he has been much annoyed at various developments over the Lebanon crisis. He had wanted to visit Jerusalem, when the Israeli tanks first moved north, to negotiate personally with prime minister Menachem Begin. This was countermanded, at the recommendation of National Security Adviser William Clark. Instead talks remained the responsibility of the President's special envoy, Philip Habib. Then Haig's position was undercut further by the nomination of a "special situation group" under Vice-president George Bush to monitor the whole Middle East scene.

Last week, though, the divisions grew to chasm size. Piecing the story together from sources in Beirut and various tight-lipped informants in Washington, events developed like this.

A series of triangular telephone calls, involving King Fahd, who succeeded 10 days ago to the throne of Saudi Arabia, Yasser Arafat, head of the PLO in besieged Beirut, and William Clark's NSC staff in Washington had, by Tuesday, produced the outlines of a peace settlement.

Under this Arafat agreed to a complete end of Palestinian military presence in Lebanon, leaving the movement only with diplomatic and civilian-refugee status. In return the US would use all its influence on Israel to get a withdrawal of its troops to a line three miles outside the capital and a full-scale truce removing all threat of a Beirut bloodbath.

The Saudi foreign minister phoned Arafat on Wednesday morning in his rubble-strewn headquarters to confirm that all was on target. An hour later Lebanon's seven-man National Liberation Committee met at the Baadba presidential palace, confidently expecting to hear Habib give official US confirmation to the deal.

But something had gone badly wrong. Habib, instead of initialling the "honourable solution" behind which Fahd had put all his personal reputation and Saudi Arabia's massive economic power, insisted that he must have written answers to a whole series of complex questions about PLO intentions.

On Thursday, a perplexed and frustrated Arafat delivered the answers in the form of a multi-page memorandum, reaffirming his guarantee to end all PLO military activity in the Lebanon. The National Liberation Council gathered again, expecting now that Habib would formally endorse the truce. But again he stalled, while Israel's land, sea and air bombardment of the shattered city rose to new heights.

Who in Washington was sending the signals that caused Habib to delay?

Habib, a lifetime diplomat recalled from retirement to cool Middle East tempers, answers directly to the Secretary of State. Haig was the last person to see Israeli premier Begin when he left Washington. The balance of evidence, though far from definitive, is that Haig knew what was being cooked up by Clark, Fahd and Arafat — and didn't like it even though Reagan himself was now behind it.

What is not known is how firmly Haig conveyed to Begin President Reagan's determination that the peace settlement should go through, or how explicitly he later conveyed to the White House or anyone else in Washington the news of Israel's reluctance once Begin got back to Jerusalem and consulted his own cabinet.

The net result, though, was that the peace plan died and Habib was instructed to represent the maximalist Israeli position as official US policy — an order against which he reportedly submitted an official protest.

And, in the course of the confusion, Begin and Haig became losers, too. They had pinned their hopes on the National Liberation Council becoming the basis of a firm, independent government in Lebanon. But on Thursday an important segment of the always fragile council resigned.

But, while the drama of cross-signals and contradictory Middle East policies was reaching its height, another, quite different plot erupted back in Washington.

At Haig's behest, a cabinet meeting was called on Thursday to thrash out the foreign policy implications of Reagan's latest trade decisions — to block all US components and know-how needed to build Russia's giant gas pipeline to Western Europe, and to raise high tariff barriers against steel coming to America from Europe.

This meeting was not attended by Reagan himself, nor by two of Haig's more persistent critics — Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger and United Nations ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick. But Clark was there, together with Treasury Secretary Donald Reagan and Commerce Secretary Malcolm Baldrige.

Reagan's decision against the pipeline had been taken at a meeting of the National Security Council when Haig was absent. He was in New York at the UN talking to his Soviet opposite number, Andrei Gromyko, and there is a widespread feeling that the timing may have been arranged so that Haig was not around to argue his case, namely, that sabotaging the pipeline deal was likely to do far more damage to the European alliance than to the Soviet economy.

The Thursday cabinet was, therefore, extremely heated. In the course of it Haig roundly accused colleagues of attempting to sabotage his foreign policy efforts. Exchanges became highly personal. On steel tariffs, particularly, where a genuine US-European trade war is looming, he demanded a swift-reversal of attitudes, if people round the table wanted to retain their jobs.

According to some accounts, that outburst was the last straw. When Reagan heard reports of the meeting he agreed, with reluctance, that his Secretary of State must be allowed to depart — even in the middle of a series of international crises.

In another version, the outcome was postponed for 24 hours, until Friday morning, when Haig had a further, final encounter with Clark, over the Middle East muddle.

Details were impossible to confirm yesterday but from Friday lunchtime the sequence of events ran fast and clear — first Haig's letter of resignation, regretting the administration's departure from "consistency, clarity and steadiness of purpose"; then Reagan's brief emotional acceptance "with profound regret" and his announcement of the successor, George Shultz; and within an hour, Israel's proclamation of a complete ceasefire in the Lebanon war.

At 61, four years older than Haig, he brings to the job a powerful reputation for integrity, hard work and massive unflappability.

Like William Clark, with whom he will need to establish close working relationships, he brings little or no formal experience of foreign affairs to his multi-faceted task. Shultz's background is almost entirely in economics, either academically or in government.

After Princeton and the marines, he went to Massachusetts Institute of Technology as associate economics professor, and then zig-zagged smoothly in and out of the Washington mainstream. He was junior economics adviser to Eisenhower, dean of Chicago's graduate business school, secretary of labour, budget manager and treasury secretary to Nixon, then, after sticking loyally to the team till resignation day, he went into business, with Bechtel Corporation of San Francisco, where his last recorded salary was $466,000 (about £300,000) a year.

Bechtel is likely to be a sore point when his appointment comes up for confirmation by the Senate. It is America's biggest construction company, with massive interests in the oil-rich Middle East. One contract alone, to build a whole new city at Jubail in Saudi Arabia, is said to be worth some $45 billion, and Israel, without hesitation, has always characterised him as a leading member of the pro-Arab lobby.

This was almost certainly a factor in 1980, when Reagan was putting together his new government. During the transition process, Schultz had played a leading role in developing "Reaganomics."

But the job for which Reagan had Shultz as front-runner was Secretary of State, even before he considered Haig. To widespread surprise, however, Shultz withdrew, saying he preferred to stay in private business. Many ascribed that to pressure from the Zionist lobby on the senators who would be required to approve his new role.

Opinions are divided on whether this will happen again. Alan Cranston, a Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, says he is concerned about Shultz's connections with Saudi Arabia — "an Arab nation still carrying on a holy war with Israel." But the committee's chairman, Charles Percy, said yesterday there would be no obstacle. State Department officials calculate the new secretary will be so anxious to prove his even-handedness that there will be no problem.

However, even-handedness is not always an easy card to play, especially in Reagan's sharply polarised Washington. On East-West trade, for instance, the current line, as seen over the gas pipeline, is extremely hard. But Shultz's only previous direct experience of dealing with Moscow was as head of a 1973 mission set up by a detente-minded Nixon to expand US-Soviet trade.

There is little doubt, though, of Shultz's ability to handle himself in any bureaucratic storm centre. At one point in his pre-Watergate phase he had vehemently opposed Nixon's imposition of wage and price controls. But, once he had lost, he decided philosophically that, if you cannot beat them, join them — and preferably lead them yourself.

So he ambled amiably into a presidential meeting at Camp David, presented a single sheet of paper setting out how he thought the programme should be run, and stood back. Nixon took one look and said: "OK George, it's all yours". This weekend, lightning strikes for the second time.

(By special arrangement with The Sunday Times).

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Comment

Is the city Strangled?

—Olga Tellis

WHEN Bombay's Municipal Commissioner embarked upon his adventurous line of trying to evict over 700 families living on the pavements between the GPO and and Cotton Green in April, I rang up Mr. Murli Deora, BPCC (I) chief and appealed to him to make Mr. Sukhthankar see reason. I told him that I would challenge his order in the courts as being violative of the Supreme Court Order dated October 19.

I told him I would win because my stand was just, so why not avoid the huge financial expenses for him at the cost of the taxpayer, the trauma of uncertainty for the men, women and children on the pavements, not to mention the personal expenses for me and my counsel Ms. Jaising. As it turned out we won, even though it meant going to the Supreme Court four times in less than a month. The Supreme Court has stayed the proceedings.

Villages In Bondage

It is shocking that in 1982 people in authority in a democracy should be talking in terms of instilling fear in the hearts and minds of the poor, specially when Gandhiji spent a lifetime striving to rid us of fear of tyrants, colonialists and neo-colonialists. Are pavement dwellers not citizens of India? They are victims of the manmade economic disaster that keeps villages in bondage so that cities and towns can grow and fatten. Pavement dwellers are the creation of our economic system in the same way as skyscrapers are. If we accept, as Mr. Murli Deora writes that "for every centimetre of vertical poshness, there are 20 centimetres of horizontal filth", what values are we upholding and propagating?

Gandhiji wrote "to me the rise of cities like Calcutta and Bombay is a matter of sorrow rather than congratulations. India has lost in having broken up a part of her village system." Further in 1916, speaking on 'Real Economics' at the Muir College, Allahabad, he said "in South Africa, where I had the privilege of associating with thousands of our countrymen on most intimate terms, I observed almost invariably that the greater the possession of riches, the greater was their moral turpitude. Our rich men, to say the least, did not advance the moral struggle of passive resistance as did the poor. The rich men's sense of self-respect was not so much injured as that of the poorest."

Housing Racket

And so what is this "every-centimetre - of - vertical-poshness" culture for which the authorities are bent upon disrupting and causing an upheavel in the lives of thousands of our people living on pavements? The difference between the cultures of skyscrapers and the "20 centimetres of horizontal filth" that offends the drawing room tastes of some, is sensational. The skyscraper culture has bred corruption and parasitism, two evils that sap the very dharma of our nation. From the laying of the foundation stone to the selling of the premises therein, not to mention the original racket of selling reclaimed land, black money is involved. A leading builder has said that a flat changes hands no less than eight to ten times so that prices are inflated as many times.

You have to pay black money, there is no evading it. In this culture you can evade your income-tax but not black money. And who is hit hardest? The honest hard-working middle class that has no avenue or scope for making black money. So this class begs, borrows, mortgages its future, just to get a roof over its head. This class hates to pay it; it's an act of violence on their sense of what is right and just; they curse, grumble, torment and torture themselves but in the end they have to shell out their hard-earned money in black, forced to become dishonest cheats creating unaccounted money.

In contrast, take the pavement dwellers and their culture. They ask for no loans will get none, they ask for no subsidies and will get none, they ask for no reservations in employment or in schools, they ask for nothing, not even electricity or water. They live within their means and if it is the pavements they can afford, it is the pavements it will be. As Gandhiji said 'needs' and not 'wants.' They are the true followers of Gandhiji unlike the khadi-clad relics who preach Gandhism, but give Rs. 8 crores to a firangee to make a celluloid Gandhiji, dabble in black money and spawn evils of a degree that the pavement dwellers will never equal.

The pavement dwellers, like the slum dwellers, are a consequence of the government's total callousness on the housing front. As Mr. Sukhthankar himself has said the supply of new housing units is only 15,000 annually against a demand of 60,000, not to mention the backlog which has been 4.5 lakh units in the last decade. The government has totally forgotten the 79 per cent of the population of Bombay that earns less than Rs. 600 a month. They are the ones on the pavements and in the poorer slum pockets. How can the government or its paid employees like the Municipal Commissioner and the Police Commissioner penalise the poor, economically weaker sections of people for their own crimes of neglect. What moral right have they got?

Incidentally, the dig about "fashionable social worker looking for a cause" betrays a wrong analysis of the whole issue. To me the pavement dwellers issue is a monumental, non-violent, passive resistance movement, a kind of civil disobedience by a people who don't want to compromise on black money, against a government that perpetuates an economic policy, particularly a housing policy, that benefits only the black money-wallas. This is not social work but part of a struggle for the rights of the downtrodden.

A Procession Of Presidents

(Continued from Page I)

on a prolonged foreign tour. Once again, brushing aside protocol, President Prasad decided to drive to Palam personally to see off the Prime Minister. To heighten the effect of the presidential gesture, Panditji was not told of it in advance. He arrived at the airport, greeted all those present, looked at his watch and declared that it was time for his party to start boarding the plane. The President's military secretary requested him to wait as the President was on his way.

Nehru shrugged his shoulders and waited. But, being a stickler for punctuality, he was clearly uneasy. He looked at his watch again and again. He fretted and fumed. It was past departure time but there was still on sign of the President. Nehru said he must take off without further delay. A mortified military secretary entreated him not to do so. The President had left Rashtrapati Bhavan and should be arriving any moment, he pleaded.

Delayed Departure

"Is he walking?" demanded Panditji testily, as the presidential limousine drove to the tarmac. The President and the Prime Minister managed to greet each other cordially enough before Panditji's delayed departure.

Dr. Radhakrishnan's succession to Dr. Prasad was a foregone conclusion. His qualifications to be head of state were obvious, indeed overwhelming, and he had risen to the top job—rather belatedly by his own reckoning—entirely because of Nehru's sponsorship and support. It is for this reason that what went on during his presidency is as instructive as that during Dr. Prasad's.

Not to put too fine a point on it, Dr. Radhakrishnan proved that a President who is virtually a nominee of the prime minister does not necessarily have good relations with his sponsor after he is ensconced in Rashtrapati Bhavan. In Dr. Radhakrishnan's case estrangement with Panditji was particularly tragic and painful because it coincided with the start of Nehru's declining years.

The Chinese invasion of Ladakh and NEFA (now called Arunachal Pradesh) followed soon after Dr. Radhakrishnan's arrival at Rashtrapati Bhavan. He was unrelenting in denouncing Panditji for "credulity and negligence". In private he was even more harsh. Indeed he succumbed to the temptation of partaking in political intrigue aimed at clipping the Prime Minister's wings, if not replacing him with a war council, headed by (guess who?) the President!

Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri was Prime Minister for much too short a time. With Mrs. Gandhi, Dr. Radhakrishnan's relations were extremely cordial to begin with. In an interview to the well-known Egyptian journalist, Mr. Heikal, the President described her as the "prettiest Prime Minister in the world." But soon enough Dr. Radhakrishnan became vocal in his criticism of her government and Mrs. Gandhi made no secret of her opinion that he should not have a second term.

Dr. Zakir Husain both lent distinction to the office of President and rescued it from the arena of controversy and intrigue in high places. He had his views, of course, and he certainly did not lack the courage of his conviction. But he had the good sense to give his advice quietly and in private rather than air his differences with the government in public. But his was a sadly short-lived tenure.

Ironically, it was his untimely death that plunged the presidency into the vortex of the most tumultuous controversy it has been embroiled in so far.

Enter, Mr. V. V. Giri who knew that he had won because Mrs Gandhi, ditching her party's official nominee, Mr. Sanjiva Reddy, had thrown her support behind him. But he pretended that he had become President on his own.

He was the first incumbent of the presidency publicly to use the fashionable phrase, "Rubber-stamp President," proclaiming that he would not be one and thus casting an unwarranted slur on his predecessors. He could also be contentious. He was opposed to several measures of Mrs. Gandhi's government, especially those designed to crush the railwaymen's strike in 1974. But he wisely refrained from coming to a head-on clash with the government on this score. In the end he signed all the ordinances placed before him. Three years after his retirement Mr. Giri wrote an article on his experience in Rashtrapati Bhavan as well as on presidential powers. He came to the sound conclusion that Dr. Ambedkar was profoundly right and those seeking to invest the office of president with executive powers profoundly wrong. But he rightly pointed out that even within this framework the president's moral authority was immense. He could, for instance, deflect the government from a wrong course by resigning rather than endorsing an improper law or action. At the same time he was candid enough to admit that he himself did not consider it necessary to make such a protest over the ban on the rail strike although Acharya Kripalani strongly urged him to do so.

No president has been criticised so sharply — and indeed pilloried even posthumously — as the late Mr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. It was his misfortune to have to sign the proclamation of internal emergency on a hot and stifling June night almost exactly seven years ago. His death in harness a few months later did nothing to temper the inflamed feelings against him.

Dramatic Vindication

Now, however, a mild breeze of change seems to be blowing as far as his memory is concerned. Some of the critics of Giani Zail Singh's elevation to be office of president have, in fact, raised the question whether he could have the kind of qualms that Mr. Ahmed undoubtedly did about the imposition of emergency and other things that happened in its wake.

In Mr. Sanjiva Reddy's election as president, and that too by consensus, there was an element of dramatic vindication as well as irony. As the duly chosen candidate of the then undivided Congress party in 1969, he had been done down by Mrs. Gandhi. And yet, eight years later, when one of his main supporters, Mr. Morarji Desai, became prime minister he too shied away from sponsoring Mr. Reddy's candidature for the presidency! Mr. Desai wanted to make Mrs. Rukmini Devi Arundale the president. But he was successfully opposed by other Janata leaders.

Relations between Mr. Reddy and Mr. Desai, never of the best, deteriorated as the activities of the then Prime Minister's son, Mr. Kanti Desai, started attracting unfaltering attention. From all accounts the President never minced his words about these goings-on. On one famous occasion he is reported to have gone so far as to tell Mr. Desai to his face that while the Prime Minister went to his office in South Block, the Prime Minister's house at 1, Safdarjung Road was turned into a "commission agency" by Kantibhai.

When Mr. Desai's government fell the bickering between the President and the outgoing Prime Minister became worse. At this stage, the President acquired the room for acting on his own that constitutional pundits had been talking about for years. No party had a clear majority in the Lok Sabha and Mr. Reddy had considerable discretion in deciding on who to call upon to form a government.

He could not be faulted for his decision to ask Mr. Charan Singh to do so, especially after Mr. Desai had submitted to him a demonstrably false list of his supporters. But Mr. Reddy's action in accepting Mr. Charan Singh's advice to dissolve the Lok Sabha and to make him caretaker Prime Minister evoked furious controversy then and continues to be controversial to this day.

The crowning irony of it all is that President Sanjiva Reddy has been accused of so managing things as to pave the way for Mrs. Gandhi's return to power. The truth, however, is that his relations with her have been hardly less strained than with Mr. Desai.

During a visit to Australia Mrs. Gandhi had no hesitation in declaring that the President belonged to the opposition — a statement he surely does not agree with. For his part, Mr. Reddy has said many harsh things about Mrs. Gandhi's government even in public. On some occasions, though, he has blamed the press for misreporting him. But this has not prevented him from firing a verbal broadside at the next opportunity. Last December the ugliest of rumours about the tussle between the President and the Prime Minister circulated in the capital. And these were revived last month after the dismal drama of Mr. Bhajan Lal's installation as chief minister in Haryana.

Unlike his predecessors, Mr. Reddy has written his memoirs which he hopes to publish soon after returning home to Anantpur after relinquishing office. This should greatly enliven the discussions on presidents and presidential powers if, as is generally expected, Mr. Reddy has not refrained from pulling his punches.