

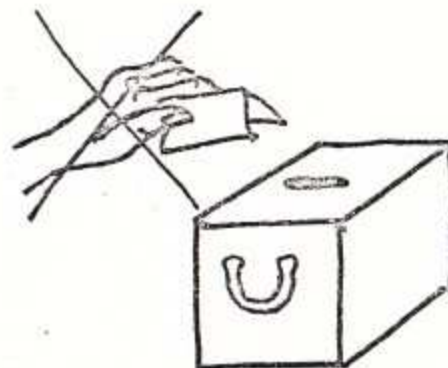
Join the INDIAN WORKERS' ASSOCIATION (GB), a national organization of Indian workers, to fight against racialism in Britain, to support the struggles of the Indian people for the establishment of a People's Democratic India, and to support national liberation struggles and struggles throughout the world against imperialism of all types. For information about branches, etc, please write to the Secretary, IWA(GB), at 45 Greenside Road, Birmingham 24.

The ALLIANCE AGAINST FASCIST DICTATORSHIP IN INDIA is open to organizations and individuals of all nationalities who support the struggle of the Indian people for genuine independence, freedom and people's democracy, and who are willing to unite on the basis of three demands:

1. The release of ALL political prisoners.
2. The establishment of true democratic rights, ie freedom of publication, assembly, speech and the right to strike.
3. The freedom from interference of all foreign powers, and particularly the two superpowers.

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INDIA'S General Elections are a FRAUD



A joint publication of the Indian Workers' Association (GB) and the Alliance Against Fascist Dictatorship in India.

INDIA'S GENERAL ELECTIONS ARE A FRAUD

We believe that the Indian General Elections announced for March 1977 are a fraud; that the opposition parties contesting the Election present no real alternative to the ruling Congress Party; that the present parliamentary system is a deliberate fraud intended to delude the Indian people into thinking that they are free to choose their own system of government, whereas in fact they have no such freedom. We believe that, even without the present State of Emergency in India, elections can do no more than decide which section of the ruling classes will repress the Indian people. We are of the opinion that whichever side wins the elections, no significant change will take place in the lives of the majority of Indian people, who are living in indescribable poverty and servitude. In order to explain our stand, it is necessary to go back beyond the declaration of 'National Emergency' on June 26, 1975.

Reasons behind the Emergency

At the time, the Indian government gave 2 main reasons for imposing an additional state of emergency on top of the one that was already in force, namely: a) the threat of a CIA-inspired coup and b) the threat of chaos within the country presented by forces 'hostile to democracy' who were allegedly preventing Mrs Gandhi and her government from carrying out their intended progressive measures to better the lot of the Indian people. The last remnants of Indian democracy were destroyed, according to Mrs Gandhi, 'to save democracy'. In fact the imposition of 'National Emergency' and the accompanying fascist laws and repression were the only way left open to the Congress government to control the Indian people, who as a result of the appalling economic situation coupled with increasing corruption in high places (culminating in Mrs Gandhi's own conviction for election malpractices) and ever more frequent violations of all their civil rights, had run out of patience.

But it has to be made clear that neither emergencies nor repression are new to the citizens of 'independent' India. Soon after independence Jawaharlal Nehru sent the Indian army to crush the peasants of Telengana. There has been a state of emergency in the country almost uninterruptedly since 1962. The size of the police force has increased over 52 times since 1951. Various preventive detention acts have empowered the government to detain political opponents

without trial since long before 1975. Manipulations by the ruling Congress party to stay in power were already commonplace. The 'Daily Telegraph' of 17th October 1963 talks of 'the simultaneous removal of 6 ministers in the Central Cabinet and 6 Chief Ministers in the States' and, later in the same article, entitled 'A Tighter Hand on India', goes on to say: 'The Emergency is still with us. The Government has no present intention of lifting the Defence of India rules. The Government has just banned the showing of a newsfilm of a large Communist demonstration against the Government. The pamphlet 'Guidance for the Press in the Present Emergency' has already been used to suppress newspaper items.'

Since the late 1960s, government attempts to put down the many struggles of the Indian people for a better life have become increasingly frantic and violent. This has not stopped people from rising time and time again to fight on a wide variety of issues. To name but some: the Naxalbari peasant uprising of 1967 and the ensuing peasant struggles in various parts of the country, the all-India railwaymen's strike of 1974 and the mass anti-corruption movements in Gujarat and Bihar in the same year all met with violent suppression. In a report published in 1974, Amnesty International estimated that at that time there were 15,000-20,000 political prisoners in West Bengal alone. All this in supposedly 'democratic' pre-Emergency India! Unable to solve the pressing problems of the Indian people, unable to quench their fighting spirit, unable to cover up any longer the rottenness of its own rule, the Congress government, determined to stay in power, was forced to resort to a 'National Emergency' of such extremes that it imprisoned political activists of all parties, including its own, who had dared to oppose it.

'Gains' of the Emergency

Nevertheless, the Indian people were told that the Emergency was for their own good, and the world was reminded time and again by the Indian government and its agencies and spokesmen abroad that, as a result of the Emergency, India's economic situation had greatly improved and that the country was going forward at a tremendous pace with a new discipline and vigour. However, despite strict Press censorship, truth has a way of getting out, and gradually the other side of the story, not so palatable to Mrs Gandhi and her apologists, became well known. What did Mrs Gandhi's 'socialism' really mean for the working people of India, whom, according to Congress party rhetoric ever since 1947, it was intended to benefit? This unique

'socialism' could only be put into practice by imprisoning tens of thousands of political activists, students, trade unionists and others; by depriving them even of the right to appeal or to know the charges against them; by censoring the Press, expelling journalists, impounding presses, banning meetings, forbidding strikes, smashing up trade union offices, amending the constitution, placing the Prime Minister and various other 'dignitaries' above the law, banning 39 political groups and parties and 'legalizing' through a series of ordinances dictatorial powers in the hands of the Prime Minister. In order to carry out a 20-point programme to abolish poverty, workers' bonus payments had to be halved (and in some cases stopped altogether), half a million workers subjected to lock-outs, another 700,000 laid off. So that the economic 'gains' should not be eroded by a too-rapidly increasing population, it was necessary to send bands of thugs into villages and poor quarters of cities (especially the Muslim and Harijan quarters) to forcibly sterilize young and old, married and single, childless persons and those with children alike. Within 6 months, 3 million people had been sterilized in pursuance of the Congress party's aim of getting rid of poverty by getting rid of the poor. These facts become even more gruesome if one remembers that the Indian government provides no form of social security whatsoever to the unemployed, the sick and the old, and that the majority of Indian people live literally from hand to mouth.

Big Business Welcomes the Emergency

There is no doubt that the Emergency did bring gains to some. For instance, to K K Birla, multimillionaire head of one of India's biggest industrialist families, who is falling over himself with praise for Mrs Gandhi's style of 'socialism'. (As far back as 1954 his relative G D Birla had enthusiastically welcome the 'socialist pattern as the only way to preserve capitalism'!)

'It is ironic,' writes Simon Scott Plummer in 'The Times' of 26th January 1977, 'that the declaration of India as a socialist, as well as sovereign, democratic and secular republic in the constitutional changes last year should have coincided with a mood amounting almost to euphoria among capitalist circles in the country. The managers of private companies interviewed during visits to Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi without exception welcomed the imposition of Emergency rule in June 1975. 'We hear less socialist rhetoric now', a company

director said. 'Political control has been tightened since the Emergency but economic control lessened'. He was referring to relaxation of industrial licensing procedures and import controls; lowering of income tax (to a maximum of 66%) and taxes of certain commodities (note: on luxury items); granting of export subsidies; and withdrawal of restrictions on dividends. Liberalization in these matters was accompanied by tough action against labour. Strikes were made illegal under the Emergency and the number of man-days lost because of disputes more than halved. For businessmen the fall in the incidence of industrial unrest was the most tangible benefit of the Emergency. The cancellation of the automatic annual bonus to workers was also much appreciated.'

This is the real essence of Mrs Gandhi's 'socialism': to attempt to expand capitalism in India, no matter at what cost to the working people. No wonder the businessmen are happy!

Support Overseas

Mrs Gandhi's 'noble' aim of putting India firmly on the capitalist road has won the support and admiration of those elements in the West who had been disturbed by the people's struggles of the 60s and 70s and feared losing India as a haven for investments, profits and dividends. The Confederation of British Industry in November 1976 saw fit to send its most high-powered delegation since 1947 to discuss terms with Mrs Gandhi. Not surprisingly, this delegation, under

the leadership of Sir Ralph Bateman, came to the correct conclusion: 'Certainly the opportunities are now better. India now appears to be more ready to import capital goods, and it would appear that for the British capital goods salesman a definite selling opportunity now exists'. They were also, understandably, much impressed by Mrs Gandhi's 'more liberal and pragmatic approach'. Liberal, that is, to industrialists.

So pleased are overseas investors with India's new-found 'stability' that the Aid India Consortium, under the leadership of the USA, has promised 1,800 million dollars of 'aid' in 1976-77, rather a peculiar situation if one recalls that Mrs Gandhi is supposed to be fighting off the CIA! The Indian government has placed advertisements in papers like the 'New York Times' openly inviting foreign investments in India, assuring the investors of the profits to be had! Profits, of course, at the expense of the Indian working people. World Bank Secretary McNamara has visited India for very friendly talks - an ironic contrast

with his visit in the late sixties, when he had to enter Calcutta city by helicopter to avoid the crowds of demonstrators, furious at the US aggression in Vietnam, who blocked the roads into the town.

Russian Enthusiasm

It is not only the Western powers that have an interest in supporting dictatorship in India. At every crucial juncture in Mrs Gandhi's reign, it has been the Soviet Union which has given her unequivocal support. When the Emergency was declared, the first warm message of praise came from Moscow. It is the Moscow-backed Communist Party of India that, notwithstanding a few minor differences, has stood almost alone at the side of Mrs Gandhi's government through the period of tyranny following June 26, 1975.

But the Soviet Union's support is not based on any high ideals or concepts of 'internationalism': its interests in India have proved to be at least as mercenary as those of the Western powers. The Emergency has seen a rapid increase in Indo-Soviet trade, so that the Soviet Union is on the point of replacing the whole of the EEC as India's biggest trading partner. The Indian economy is being increasingly dovetailed with the Russian one, to suit, of course, the senior partner. India is supplying parts and components for Russian projects in 3rd countries; joint projects with the Eastern European Comecon countries are also on the increase. (see the Financial Times of 6th Jan. 1977 and 16th Dec. 1976).

The 'benefits' of this cooperation are becoming more and more one-sided. One of the major indications of this are the recurring devaluations of the Indian rupee against the rouble. Each time this happens, India's debt load to the Soviet Union increases. In March 1976, the Russians unilaterally decided to lower the exchange rate yet again, and, despite unwillingness on the Indian side, and several rounds of discussions, this was carried out. India's debt to the Soviet Union rose by 4,000 million rupees overnight. There has been a good deal of criticism in the Indian press of the terms of trade with the Soviet Union and the way in which Russian technology is bought in preference to local technology and equipment. (A prime example is the Bokaro Steel Plant in Bihar.) In addition, under the trade agreements with the Soviet Union, India has to export scarce commodities like rubber and bauxite, not to mention top quality tea and other food-stuffs. At the same time it imports from Russia goods such as steel, of which it already has an unmarketable surplus at home.

Despite the fact that the Soviet Union is, supposedly, on the side of the world's oppressed people, Soviet 'aid' has done no more to benefit the ordinary people of India than that of its predecessors, Britain and the United States. The truth is that the present trade surplus, the growth in currency reserves (which are still nowhere near enough to pay off India's international debts) have been achieved by squeezing the workers and peasants of India more than ever before, and by imposing increasingly fascist measures to quell their inevitable opposition.

Why Elections?

Why does Mrs Gandhi need to hold elections? These elections, due constitutionally in March 1976, were recently postponed till March 1978. Then, suddenly, came the declaration that elections would be held in March 1977. The full reasons are, of course, complex, and probably known only to Mrs Gandhi herself. But, in a few words, *the strategy of emergency has failed*. Faced with the failure of the hoped-for economic revival, despite all the repressive measures taken against the working class, confronted by the increasing resistance of many sections of the population to fascist measures, threatened with the disintegration of her own party, Mrs Gandhi realized that it was now or never. This was her last chance to try to achieve some 'moral' authority for her legalized dictatorship, to try to justify the tyranny of the last 18 months by showing that the majority of the people 'support' her. She decided to silence her critics by showing the world that the Indian people were behind her.

But the very announcement of elections proved that Mrs Gandhi has not had it all her own way since June 1975. By 1976, it was being claimed that India had a negative rate of inflation and that this was the result of the Emergency. But in recent months there have been numerous reports that inflation is once again giving cause for concern. Food prices are said to have risen by 10% in the last 5 months and the estimated annual rate of inflation is now 18%. Naturally the high prices (which remained beyond the purchasing power of the majority of people even at the height of the Emergency's 'gains') and the deteriorating economic situation have caused deep discontent among working

people. As many as 250,000 workers have been involved in strikes over the bonus question in Western India. Between 60,000 and 70,000 textile workers went on strike for several days in mid-October 1976. There have been strikes in the mines, engineering and pharmaceutical industries and there was a 3-day work to rule in the Port of Bombay in October 1976. The Jamshedpur iron and steel complex has experienced a prolonged go-slow. There have been stoppages in the jute industry and lengthy strikes in the tobacco and shoe industries. Tea gardens also experienced a 1-day strike. In Bangalore, a strike at the Indian Telephone Industries is reported to have resulted in violent action against the police, the arrest of 300 workers and the closure of the factory for 5 days. *Few of these events were even mentioned in the Indian press due to the pre-censorship rules.*

According to 'The Times' of 25th January 1977, 'provisional figures released to the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, in August 1976, revealed that 625 strikes involving 300,782 workers and causing the loss of 1,702,161 man-days, took place between January and June 1976. The figures in the previous 6 months were 483 strikes, 149,370 workers and 1,466,730 man-days. Figures for the 2nd half of 1976 are expected to be higher than those for the 1st half. To those outbreaks of unrest, none of which was reported in the national press because of censorship, must be added widespread passive resistance to the Government, by which employees obey orders but refuse to take any initiative.'

By October, 1976, even Mrs Gandhi herself was forced to admit, to a conference of Secretaries and Inspectors-General of Police, that the 'good atmosphere' generated by the emergency had been 'eroded'. (Statesman, October 31st).

It is clear that the Emergency's draconian laws have failed to intimidate the Indian people. Strikes and stoppages are no less than acts of heroism in the present conditions of mass arrests and indefinite imprisonment. Workers risk not only their livelihood but their lives. Moreover, the compulsory sterilization teams (more often than not accompanied by armed police) have met with vehement opposition in towns and villages. People of the Muslim quarter in Delhi fought a running battle with police against forced sterilization and the wholesale bulldozing of their homes; in the villages, police parties have been chased out by angry villagers, and in some cases police have been killed and wounded. The people, too, have died in such incidents, but that has not made them succumb to fascism.

There has been resistance among other sections of the population too. Students have boycotted classes. TENS of thousands of people have been arrested for offering 'satyagraha' (voluntary arrest) in protest against the violations of civil rights. Underground journals have been published all over the country and abroad. (At one time the government issued an ordinance banning 70 of these at the same time.) It is only a few political leaders who have humiliated themselves by seeking a 'dialogue' with dictatorship.

Dissension in the Ruling Party

The resignation from the Congress Party of senior minister Mr Jagjivan RAM shortly after the announcement of elections is proof of the widening rift amongst various sections of the ruling party itself. Not only has the Emergency failed to 'control' opposition parties, not only has it failed to intimidate the Indian people, but it has increased Mrs Gandhi's problems within her own party. Chief Ministers and other high officials like the Chief Justice are appointed and dismissed at the whim of the Prime Minister. (Some say, at the whim of her son, Sanjay Gandhi.) Discontent has been mounting on all sides. So, in yet another desperate attempt to cling to power, Mrs Gandhi announced elections. But under what conditions?

George Fernandes, imprisoned Chairman of the Socialist Party, wrote on 19th January 1977 from Tihar Prison, Delhi: 'Mrs Gandhi has dissolved the Lok Sabha and called for a fresh poll. It is obvious that she wants to have it on her own terms. The Emergency continues, civil liberties remain suppressed, the Press stays muzzled, the Radio, TV and other media are used to sing the glories of Mother and Son, the sword of MISA (The Maintenance of Internal Security Act) continues to hang over the heads of all political workers who may dare criticize her and - as of today - activists of political parties continue to rot in jail. In announcing her decision to hold fresh elections in March, Mrs Gandhi has once again demonstrated her contempt for the opposition parties and particularly for those who were seeking a dialogue with her to restore normalcy. Evidently, she believes that whenever she calls the tune and whatever the tune she calls, the opposition will dance to it.'

He goes on to call upon his party to boycott the elections. But what has been the response of the political opposition in India to the election announcement?

Non-Communist Opposition

Not only did the Socialist Party ignore the call of George Fernandes to boycott the elections - the non-communist parliamentary opposition parties have without exception danced to Mrs Gandhi's tune. They have been joined by defectors from Mrs Gandhi's own party. Already their statements indicate that they would be only too happy to go back to the state of affairs that existed before June 26 1975, choosing to ignore the extremities of political repression that already existed at that time. All they want is the unlimited 'freedom' to play the parliamentary game as they did before. Their recent statements about the number of political prisoners whom they want to see released (6,000-8000 according to 'The Sunday Times' of 13th Feb. 1977 and the 'Stateman Weekly' of 5th Feb. 1977) omit the estimated 30,000 political prisoners, mainly supporters and members of the various Marxist-Leninist groups, who were in prison long before the Emergency and who have not been included among those released so far. Is it that the parliamentary opposition parties are just as keen as Mrs Gandhi to keep the true revolutionaries behind bars? Are they willing to make any statement at all about the inhuman conditions in which these and other prisoners are kept? Are they at all concerned that people have been held in prison without trial for 7 years or more? Their utterances so far conveniently avoid this subject.

It seems that the leaders of these parties are contented with the mere word 'elections'. What they want is the 'form' of democracy, without the substance. How can they forget the humiliation to which they and their followers have been put in the last 1½ years? How can they forget the detailed list of torture cases that their supporters abroad submitted to the United Nations Committee for Human Rights? How can they forget that many of them have only just, by the grace of Mrs Gandhi, left prison? That many of their supporters are still there? How can Morarji Desai speak about his own good treatment whilst under detention and ignore the ghastly conditions, the torture and deprivation inflicted upon so many others? Where is the noble talk of 'civil liberties now? Where the determination to fight? Can the mere word 'elections' transform India overnight? Is 'democracy' to be given or taken away by the will of Mrs Gandhi and her supporters?

Communist Parties

It is difficult to describe the Communist Party of India as an opposition party, because, under its slogan of 'Unity and Struggle', it both opposes and supports Mrs Gandhi at the same time. Whereas at the 5-day session of the party's National Council in Hyderabad last August its General Secretary, C Rajeswara Rao, told newsmen that the Emergency had done immense good to the health of the nation and praised the Centre's role in giving a new direction favourable for world peace and progress, by February 9th, 1977 the CPI was attacking the Emergency as 'anti-democratic' and saying that it had been used 'against the working class and common people'. It is hard to beat that for doubletalk. The CPI, it seems, wants to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds at the same time. Why has it taken the CPI so long to discover that the Emergency was an anti-worker measure? Why did they support the Congress Party whilst mass arrests of working people, of students, of trade union and other political activists were going on? While workers' bonuses were being cut and strikes banned? Whilst meetings were prohibited and the press censored? And what is the substance of the present 'criticism' when already they have made lec

the present 'criticism' when they have already made electoral arrangements with the Congress Party in several states, so that their candidates will not stand against Congress candidates? In reality, they are still the Congress's main partner.

And what of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)? After some initial 'discussion', it too has decided to join the election bandwagon. At least, as the 'Stateman Weekly' of 5th February 1977 points out, this will give some work to its cadres, 'already demoralized by prolonged inaction'. This 'revolutionary' party has, in fact never taken any meaningful stand against the Emergency. No doubt the leadership is only too happy to have an election, even one which it describes as 'patently unfair and dishonest', to concentrate its energies on. How can these leaders forget the past few years? How can they forget that their cadres have been among the main victims of repression since long before the Emergency? How can they forget the arrests under MISA, in the early 1970s, the smashing up of their trade union branches in West Bengal, the murders by Congress Party thugs, the wholesale arrests of its followers after the Emergency? The CPI(M) has always been first to shout about the atrocities

committed upon it, but what has it ever done to take a principled stand against them? What is it doing to give correct guidance to its revolutionary cadres in creating a new India? Does it really believe that participation in elections will be any more meaningful than in the past?

The various groups of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), all banned since the Emergency, have always taken the stand of boycotting the present type of elections, which have never brought any benefit to the majority of the Indian people. What freedom has an indebted peasant, a sharecropper or a bonded labourer dependent on landlords and moneylenders for his very existence, to choose the political system he wants? The following anecdote, quoted in 'Mainstream' of February 5th 1977, is illustrative of the position of a typical poor peasant in India:

'A year after the President promulgated the ordinance abolishing bonded labour, an official of the Union Labour Ministry toured a district of Madhya Pradesh where some bonded labourers had been identified but not yet freed. They had not heard of the new law and wanted to know who had passed it. The official explained that it had been passed by the Governments in New Delhi and Bhopal. But the labourers were not convinced. 'Our government has passed no such law' they said. 'And which is your government?' the official asked. They did not say anything for a few moments. Then one of them whispered the name of the biggest moneylender and landlord in the village.'

If people like these bonded labourers vote for a particular candidate in elections, does it really mean they are voting for a particular political system, or that they believe that he will really do good for them? Of course not. Economic dictates and the constraints under which they live will determine both their votes and those of millions of others. The CPI(ML) groups have been consistently honest in rejecting such elections as a farce, and in rejecting the path of so-called 'non-violence' that, in practice, has always meant that the government can walk all over the people and the people are supposed to lie down and let them do it. No wonder that the Marxist-Leninist groups are still under Mrs Gandhi's ban, and that so many of their cadres have been butchered or are languishing in prisons all over India!

Elections are Meaningless

The truth is that the parliamentary opposition parties are in an impasse. They do not oppose Indira Gandhi because they want to get rid of the present system, but because they want to run it themselves. In truth they would like to turn the clock back and forget the years of fascism. But the Emergency has created a precedent, and there can be no going back now. It is clear now that there is only one way left open for those who really want to create a better India: the path of revolutionary change. And this is what the leaders of those parties fear even more than they fear Mrs Gandhi's dictatorship. But for the followers of those parties and for the people of India it is becoming increasingly clear: *the fact is, that whichever faction comes out on top in elections, is of no consequence to the Indian people.* For this reason we believe that the elections should be boycotted and that by so doing the Indian people should show their disgust with the present election politics, that amount only to infighting between groups representing various ruling class interests or allied to various foreign powers. All the elections held since 1947 have not benefited the poor peasants and workers who form the majority of the population.

The Indian people will not win genuine independence and democracy through the present ballot boxes, boxes whose padlocks are firmly in the hands of the big landowning and industrialist minorities, and, through them, of imperialist powers. The working people of India will only win true democracy when, rejecting the path of sham elections, they take matters into their own hands and fight to abolish the remnants of feudalism in the countryside, oust all imperialist powers and all those big capitalists who are subservient to them, and when they get rid of all doubletalking leaders who speak of socialism and revolution but in acts support the status quo. It is only when these conditions are fulfilled that the Indian people will be able to participate meaningfully in elections and guide their own destiny.