weaponry and exercising all the smartness that money can buy in the continuous refining of logistics and, at the other end, another with a population of hardly 20 million, a per capita income wobbling around 60 dollars per annum and an improvised war machine which seemingly ought to come apart any moment but which is somehow kept going only by will power. The latter group of people are, in addition, fighting on their own soil, or at least on contiguous territory which they claim as their own. The three hundred thousand American personnel are eight to ten thousand miles away from their homeland; their claim to legitimacy for being where they are cannot be countenanced even as a wry joke.

And yet very few people — people who are otherwise decent and humane, who love children and birds and animals, who read poetry and listen to nocturnal sonatas, who do research on the Red Sea Scrolls and the Primal Roots of Non-Violence — dare to stand up and be counted as being against the American atrocities. This is the circumstance with otherwise good-intentioned individuals in this country, as much as it is elsewhere but perhaps a shade worse. One reads of occasional demonstrations by students and intellectuals, or of stray statements by academics, writers and artistes, but the mainstream of national emotion is hardly involved. Even in the land of Bertrand Russell, the erstwhile marchers at Aldermaston are reduced to a thin trickle now that the Cause is Vietnam.

Vietnam, alas, is not Spain, although it was meant to be. And while we ride at national government for their timidity, it will be myopic not to note the parallel decadence of private ethics. Even in the best of times, national governments modulate particular courses of action to a large extent in response to pressures which develop from outside. It is the empathies and antipathies of the pace-setters which, with a time lag, get reflected in the corpus of official policy.

In regard to Vietnam, it is not that they are looking the other way; but and large the Indian middle class just does not care. Let there be no illusions on this score: Indira’s Government will lose very few votes merely because she has chickened out on Vietnam.

If there has been an abdication of morality, the abdication has spread beyond the narrow confines of politicians and bureaucrats. It could be that the community as a whole is afflicted by apathy so dense that not even Vietnam, with its open-and-shut moral appeal, is an adequate Cause; passion needs more blatant provocations in these days. It could be that matter triumphs over mind even on the individual plane. Several Vietnamese girls of good family — and good education — have joined Saigon bars and massage parlours because the lure of American money proved too much. The lure of American money is perhaps claiming many other victims — distinguished and not so distinguished — all over the world.

First Six Months

Cameralist

PRIME Minister Indira Gandhi completed six months of her stewardship of the country last month.

She was elected to this high office, not because the majority leaders of the party thought that she was superior to themselves, but because they were apprehensive of her rival and thought that she, with her lack of hold on the party machine and supposedly feminine pliability, would be a more amenable instrument in their hands. Being Nehru’s daughter was also a strong point in her favour in an election year.

During her short tenure of office, however, Indira has confounded her friends and foes alike by demonstrating that she has a mind of her own and that she is not all that pliable. She was, no doubt, rather unsure of herself in her speeches and actions during the first few weeks. But she gained confidence fairly quickly and soon started giving firm and prompt decisions. One may question the wisdom of some of these decisions. But no one can accuse her of indecision. There is in her a touch of her father’s foibles — petulence, sharp temper, and almost irrational loyalty to protege. But she has to be more circumspect than her father. For, she has yet to build up that unassailable position in the party and in the country which was her father’s.

A woman ruler is under a special handicap until she has been able to consolidate her position. In the beginning, every group leader wants to advise and control her and soon faction fights start among them. Either the ruler is able to satisfy every one that she is not too close to any one in particular as Queen Elizabeth I did and enjoy a long tenure of office or fail to survive the initial period of uncertainty as was Sultana Razia’s sad fate.

Already faction fights have started in the party and the Government. The attack is not yet directly against the Prime Minister. She is too valuable as an election symbol to be touched. Moreover, rival factions have not yet lost hope of getting her on their side. But a bitter attack has already started against her supposed confidantes who are being painted as the villains who are misleading a simple lady. Ideological preferences, personal prejudices and differences in outlook which age difference engenders have got curiously mixed up in all this. Whether it will be necessary for the Prime Minister to sacrifice an Essex or not has yet to be seen. But the real difficulties for her will arise after and not before the election. The selection of candidates, nominations for safe seats, the proportion of the Prime Minister’s supporters who get elected will all determine her strength relatively to that of the party bosses after the election. If an adequate number of her supporters get elected and if she devotes sufficient attention to securing a firm control over the party machine, she should be in a position to choose her own men to run the government, pursue her own policies and give the country the strong leadership that it so badly needs. Otherwise, she will either be buffeted about between different factions and pushed into an untenable position ultimately or con-
tinute as a mere figurehead. If only she takes the necessary steps from now on to ensure that people of her own persuasion hold key positions in the party no less than in the government that she will be effective. She cannot yet afford to function as her father used to do and not pay any attention to the party.

Although the Prime Minister has yet to prove her mettle in dealing with the party bosses, she has already given some evidence of the hard glint in her character in the other fields. One may or may not agree with her policies but her treatment of the extremists in the country, the manner in which she faced the storm on the proposed Indo-US Education Foundation, the fertilizer deal, devaluation of the rupee and the size of the Fourth Plan and the firm way in which she resisted the pressure to sacrifice some of her confidantes show that she is made of a tougher stuff than she had earlier been thought to be.

A strong criticism of her regime has been that it has dissipated the wonderful spirit of national discipline and self-confidence that was generated in the country in the wake of the Pakistani hostilities. The fact is that this dissipation had really begun in Shastriji’s last days when India had to ask for larger PI, 480 aid to combat the effects of the drought. The Tashkent Agreement also led to a weakening of this ardour. It is an open question, however, whether this ardour could be revived and kept up had Indira’s Government taken a tougher line on foreign aid than it did.

The choice was not easy. On one hand there was the question of national ardour; on the other, that of the well-being of millions of poorer people. Things would have been perhaps easier for the Government if negotiations for foreign aid for the Fourth Plan and the devaluation of the rupee had not taken place about the same time and the latter could be postponed until after the election. One does not know whether that would have been feasible. But a serious criticism against her Government is that it threw away its political cards too early in the game and relied too much upon its economic cards which were really not the strongest.

The storm that broke after devaluation threatened to shatter the Fourth Plan. It was mainly the Prime Mi-

ponent's firm stand that saved the Plan from going to pieces. It emerged, however, badly scarred. In real terms, the Fourth Plan is Rs 1,000 crores less than what Shastri had agreed to in September last year and Rs 2,000 crores less than what Panditji had approved shortly before his death. An irreparable damage has been done to the Fifth Plan and it is unlikely that any of the objectives for the year 1975-76 set out in the Third Plan will be achieved by that year. The disciplines which are essential if devaluation is to yield the results expected of it seem difficult to impose in a situation in which rising prices and impending elections are acting as powerful destabilising factors. The continuing uncertainty about Pakistan and about China's intentions towards India is aggravating an already difficult situation. Even if there is no recurrence of hostilities, demands of defence will continue to impose further heavy burdens on the economy.

The next six months are likely to prove much more difficult for the Prime Minister than even the last six. She came to power largely because she was her father's daughter. But she will have to be, much more, calculating and circumspect but tough than her father if she is to retain power on her own terms.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Intellectuals and Public Affairs

It is one thing for intellectuals not to mix into the normal hub of politics, but it is quite another to permit this rapid descent into blackness which is taking away all the most precious gifts of a decent society. One of the most precious gifts is individual freedom. It is therefore appalling to hear every day of men being robbed of their personal and political freedom in the name of the State, but it is even more frightening that no intellectuals are raising their voice in protest, in dissent, against a government policy which is a deliberate misuse of the normal safeguards against an excess of civil liberty. The latest arrests in Gujarat are just one more example of the arbitrary and peremptory methods that the Government has begun to employ, to be rid of elements which it considers undesirable.

The continuation of the Defence of India Act, the misuse of the Preventive Detention Act, the endless stream of legislation in the name of social good is grouping so many strands of power into the hands of a few, that we are in the gravest danger of losing all the advantages of a democratic society except at the time of elections, and even that could disappear pretty soon — it is only a short step now.

The time has come to put up a great and concerted fight: in this area surely politicians of all parties can unite; it is indeed heartening to read that both Swatantra and the Jan Sangh condemned the arrests of the Left Group in Gujarat but this is not enough. In this area above all surely, the intellectuals can shake themselves from apathy, and challenge at any level the dreadful sins that are being committed in the name of the State. It is a sign of great imbalance in a society when the Indo-US foundation can be so successfully and vehemently attacked as an interference into our national affairs and yet the sudden wholesale imprisonment of men without any cause on vague charges which can scarcely be justified, has not evoked more than a mild comment in a few newspapers.

Individual and personal freedom or civil liberty is not the only precious gift although it is far more precious than the political freedom that came to us in 1947; in its purest form it could lead to anarchy but this is not as bad as it sounds. After all it has been said that liberalism is watered-down anarchy. We have lost the liberal tradition in Indian politics, this was Nehru's greatest disservice — and the men who are trying to revive it are not great enough to be universally trusted. But if individual freedom is to be sacrificed, if we arc to say like Belinsky that if others are to be deprived of it — if my brothers are to remain in poverty, squallor or chains — I do not want it myself, then we must make sure that the sacrifice is worthily made. The deprivation of individual freedom for the sake of ensuring that a few men will cause less trouble to the ruling party is hardly a cause worthy of so great a sacri-

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