

MORARJI DESAI'S GOVERNMENT



THE NEW DEAL IN NEW DELHI

There had been many signs of the anti-Congress wind in the final days of the 1977 election campaign, but its magnitude amazed the canniest political forecaster. In a hurricane sweep, it snuffed out thirty years of uninterrupted Congress rule in independent India, and sent Premier Indira Gandhi, and her feared lieutenants, into sudden oblivion. The Congress cookie had crumbled. And how. From an overpowering majority in the dissolved Lok Sabha, it had now been reduced to a pathetic 153 seats in a 542-seat House. Almost every one of its leaders in the Union Cabinet had been hustled out. Mrs Gandhi herself had lost by 55,000 votes to the idiosyncratic Raj Narain. Nobody had expected *her* to lose. It was like the queen being humbled by the court jester.

And to top it all was Morarji Desai, octogenarian, Gandhian, bespectacled, triumphant. Just over two months back, he had been in prison, his political career, to all appearances, finished. And here he was, on March 24, being sworn in as the fourth Prime Minister of India by Acting President B. D. Jatti. His comeback was as sensational as Mrs. Gandhi's exit. Under his chairmanship, the Janata Party had won 271 seats in the Lok Sabha, and Jagjivan Ram's Congress for Democracy had bagged 28. History was made and unmade in less than 72 hours, history at the hustings.

JATTI SWEARING IN MORARJI DESAI AS FOURTH
PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA



One sobering fact stands out above the tumult around. And that is that the electorate gave the Janata Party and its allies victory with a 'protest vote'. It was more a vote *against* the ruling party, and against Mrs Gandhi, than a vote *for* the Janata Party. The voters had clearly punished the government for its mistakes, and for the Emergency. The 'Sanjay Factor' contributed in large measure to the Congress' debacle. Sanjay Gandhi's elevation to a tyrannical, feared, 'extra-constitutional' power center had sent tempers soaring. He was trounced decisively by a nonentitled Janata candidate in the Amethi constituency.

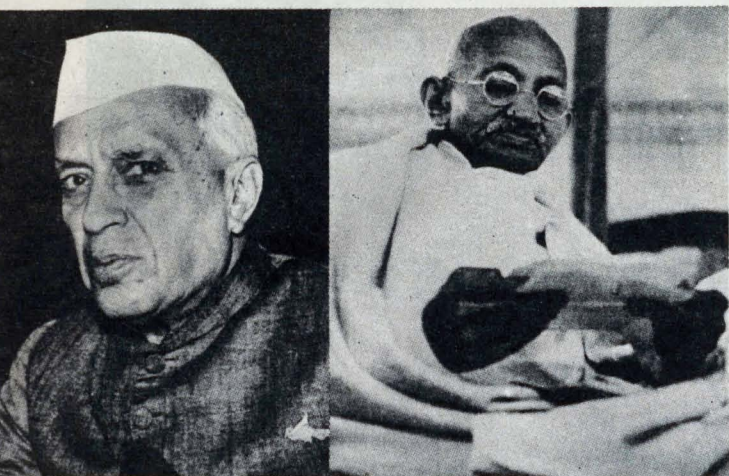
By the time the euphoria of the Janata victory had cooled, the nation was confronted with the fact that overnight, as it were, it had an entirely new government at Delhi, a new ruling class which professed objectives that were sharply at variance with what the Congress had espoused during its rule. Overnight, again, dozens of recent political commandments were tossed overboard — the Sanjay-led 'Youth Power', the 'glorious achievements' of the 20-Point Program, the discipline that the internal Emergency had imposed on the populace. The Indian electorate had exhibited a surprising degree of political maturity in ushering the new government in. It was rewarded by an entirely New Deal in independent India's history.

What characteristics of the new Central Government stand out? To begin with, most of the faces in the Cabinet are not new to the people.

The Janata Party's Morarji Desai, and the CFD's Jagjivan Ram, have both held Cabinet positions before, in Congress governments. In statesmanship, therefore, the new Government is not lacking.

It is obvious, however, that the new Government is finding the trappings of power slightly bewildering. Seasoned politicians all, the Ministers, nevertheless, must be finding the transition from the Opposition benches to the Treasury benches in Parliament not without its hurdles. Unlike the methodicity of the transition in the U.S. Administration, Morarji Desai's cabinet has had to take up the reins of governance without much preparation. So many things have to be done in so short a time that, in the first week of the Janata CFD rule, much time was lost in arguments about priorities.

The new Cabinet is comprised of members of parties that formed the Janata front — the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh, the Socialist Party, and the Bharatiya Lok Dal — and the Congress For Democracy and the Akali Dal. During the campaign, it was evident the alliance was one of immediate expediency. No formal merger of the constituent parties has yet taken place. The only factor that distinguishes the new government is that it is avowedly rightist in its outlook, in contrast with the Indira government's clearly leftist leanings. It was no surprise, therefore, when the allocation of



FROM NEHRUISM... ...BACK TO GANDHISM

portfolios to the new Ministers, and the choice of the Ministers itself, led to many frayed tempers. Jagjivan Ram obviously wanted appropriately high status for himself and H. N. Bahuguna (the other CFD leader) and only after Jayaprakash Narayan's entreaties did he agree to join the Cabinet on Morarji's terms.

In personality, the new government's members have varying characteristics. It is admirable that, whatever differences there might have been, the Cabinet was fully constituted by March 28. It was also a question, again, of expediency, because the interim Budget had to be passed by the Lok Sabha before March 31. The first week of Morarji's rule had been quite stormy.

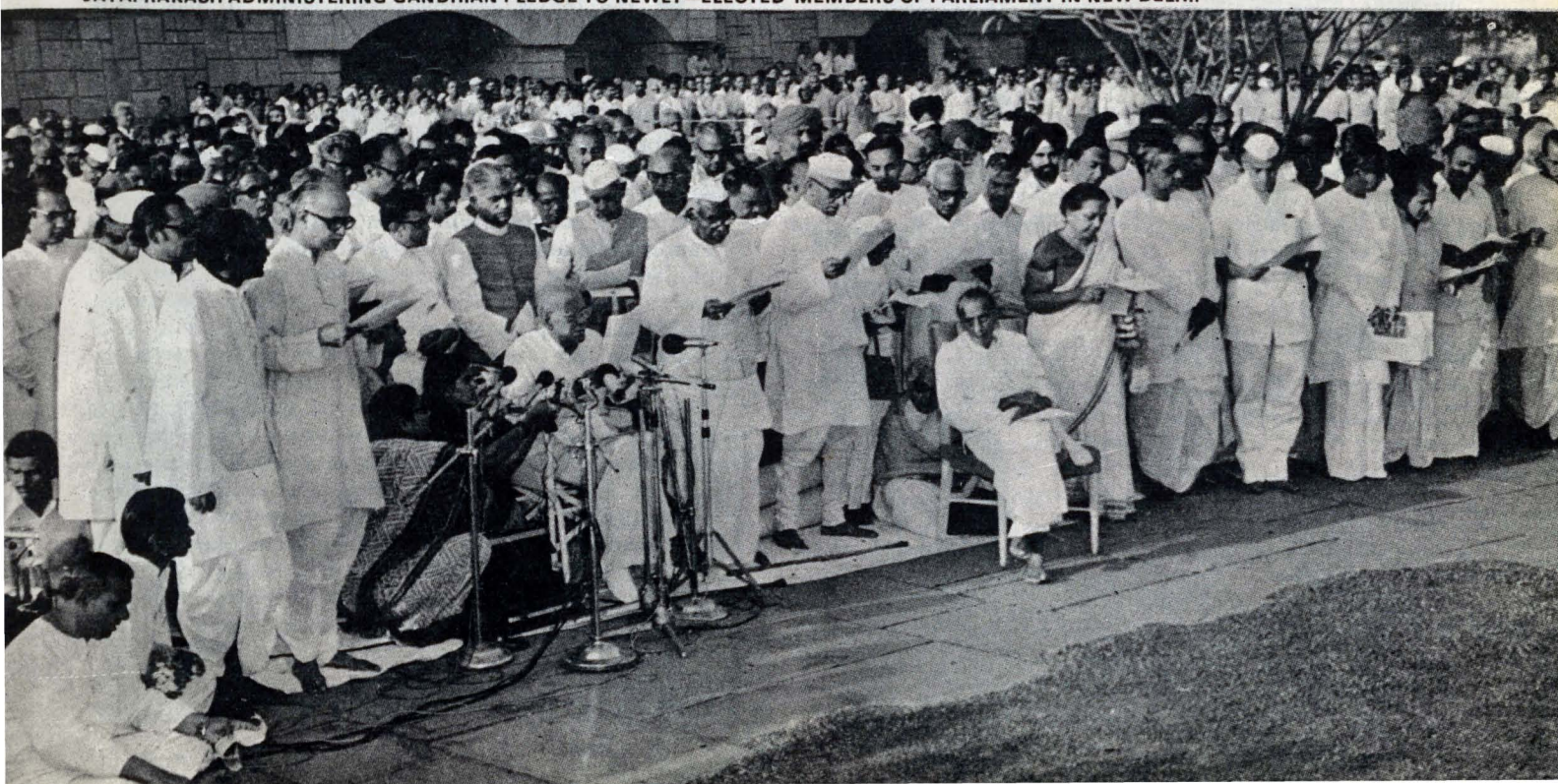
The immediate benefits of the Janata victory are evident. There is full freedom of expression again, after a year and a half of uneasy silence. The Press is reveling in its release from censorship. The terrors of the forcible steriliza-

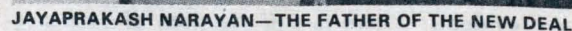
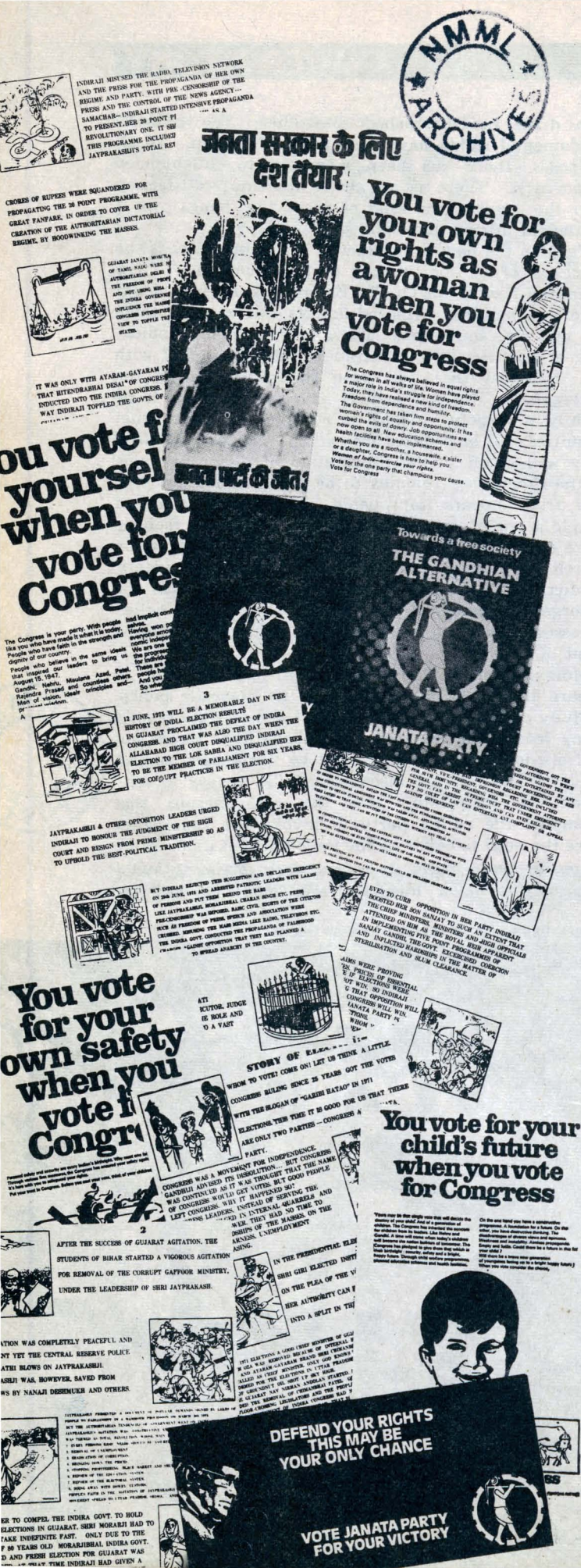
tion drive have vanished altogether. The citizen's fundamental rights have been restored to him. To all purposes, there has been a return to full-blooded democracy. There is an air of immense satisfaction over the country, the kind of peace that hangs over a battlefield after a ferocious skirmish.

First on the new government's list of priorities is the redressal of all the 'wrongs of the Emergency'. The 'Hundred New Gains Of The Emergency' have no doubt become a hundred withered flowers, but weeding them out will take some time. There is still no clear indication of how the new government intends to deal with the injustices that had been committed during the Emergency. The new leaders have promised not to be unduly revengeful. There is no doubt, however, that enquiries will be ordered into all the 'crimes'. Whether they will result in the prosecution of major *personae* of the Emergency remains to be seen. A Nuremberg-like trial appears improbable. The overall mood of people is one of 'forgive and forget'. But many feelings were echoed by Sumer Kaul in the *Indian Express* on March 26: "In a democracy, it is said, the voters' verdict is punishment enough. Is it really? Was the Emergency regime a democracy? Do the so-called excesses deserve no more than the democratic punishment of defeat?"

Morarji Desai's government will try its best to adhere to the 'Gandhian Path' in its domestic policy. A study of the Janata Party's election manifesto reveals many interesting features. The theme that stands out in front is clear: "Bread cannot be juxtaposed against liberty. The two are inseparable." "It is easy to see," reads the manifesto, "that the real reasons that prompted the ruling party to invoke the Emergency were the need to cover up the hollowness of its program of *garibi hatao*, mask its retreat from planning and a genuinely socialist ideology, and move toward the

JAYAPRAKASH ADMINISTERING GANDHIAN PLEDGE TO NEWLY-ELECTED MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT IN NEW DELHI.





In its adherence to the Gandhian path, the new government will conceivably reverse many of the Indira government's trends. It has many promises to keep. So many were made during the campaign that keeping them will prove difficult. It will not be easy undoing injustices like the forcible 're-siting' of hundreds of thousands of slum-dwellers, helping close to 7 million sterilized males, and rehabilitating a huge number of just-released political prisoners. There is also the question of whether the new ruling coalition will touch controversial issues like Family Planning, or land reform, or traditional evils like smuggling, black-marketeering, and the caste and dowry systems. In its anxiety to fulfill its promises, the Janata-CFD government might sidestep many vital problems like these, problems that will have to be solved sooner or later, albeit in a humane manner.

One important job before the new administration is the restoration of the Indian Constitution to its former

The New Social Deal

The Janata Party's social charter comprises:

1. Education reform with middle schooling for all within 12 years of age.
2. Eradication of illiteracy.
3. Safe drinking water for all.
4. Stress on community and preventive health and measures toward group health insurance.
5. A new village movement.
6. Low-cost building and mass public housing.
7. A policy regarding urbanization.
8. A comprehensive scheme of social insurance.
9. Family Planning as part of a larger population policy package, without coercion.
10. A new deal for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes with special machinery to guarantee their rights and interests.
11. A civil rights commission.
12. Automatic machinery for combating corruption.
13. Women's rights and youth welfare.
14. Legal aid and inexpensive justice.
15. Fostering people's initiatives and voluntary action.



DID MRS GANDHI BITE OFF MORE THAN SHE COULD CHEW ?

position. The Constitution had been so recklessly amended during the Emergency, that a joke making the rounds has a lawyer going into a bookshop to buy a copy of the Indian Constitution, and the shopkeeper telling him that he does not stock periodicals. The 42nd Constitution Amendment Act, in particular, has reduced the Indian citizen to little more than a pawn in the government's hands. The Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Act was incorporated in

RAJ NARAIN, THE NEW HEALTH MINISTER,
WHO DEFEATED MRS GANDHI



ROBINSON-NEWSPIX

the infamous Ninth Schedule, and eroded all remaining vestiges of press freedom. The Janata Party has promised to repeal all these amendments, but the job will not be easy. Even if the Lok Sabha votes to repeal the acts, with the Janata and the CFD mustering support from other allies, passage through the Congress-controlled Rajya Sabha, and the State Legislatures, will prove extremely tortuous.

The Janata manifesto presents an extremely gloomy picture of the Indian economy. "The party," it reads, "believes in a polity that ensures decentralization of economic and political power." The New Society will be one in which "austerity and sharing will replace pomp, ostentatious consumption, and waste". Modernization of industry, according to the new government, must be based on improved technology. Evidently, there will be a 'steering clear' of capitalism. "There is room for heavy and large-scale industry, but only where it is not possible to organize such production satisfactorily at the cottage and small-scale sector."

An important objective of the Janata Party is that it will seek to delete the right to property from the fundamental rights chapter of the Constitution. Grandiosely, however, it promises that "it is possible to eliminate destitution within a decade by raising every family above the poverty line".

Economically, the new government will accord primacy to agriculture and 'rural reconstruction'. It is committed to agrarian reforms covering "tenurial relationships, ownerships and consolidation of holdings." Landlordism is sought to be abolished altogether, and surplus land is sought to be distributed among the landless, particularly the Harijans and the Adivasis.

In industry, there will be a shift from capital-intensive to employment-oriented technologies. Legis-

lation may be introduced to assure minimum wages to all categories of workers. The worker's participation in management and equity will be encouraged.

In administration, the new government has vowed that it will erase all traces of corruption. "Unless those who hold office at the highest levels, including Ministers, legislators and bureaucrats, set an example in probity and honesty, it will be impossible to restore integrity in public life." In keeping with this aim, all Union Ministers have been asked to declare their assets as early as possible.

Electoral manifestos have rarely been remembered by past governments. Doubtless, the Morarji government will exert all its strength in proving to the electorate that it can provide a fresh direction to the nation's progress. There are many obstacles, however. For one, the government is coming in at a time when the rigours of the Emergency have left the nation demoralized and despirited. For another, it has to strive to restore a semblance of order and openness to the governance of India. Above all, it will have to prove to the electorate that it is worthy of the trust that has been reposed in it, and that it can do a job that is as good, or even better, than its predecessor could manage. Only then will the credentials of the 'viable alternative' be established.

There is no doubt that India's New Deal, and new government, enjoy a goodwill and support that is refreshing. Foreign governments have unanimously welcomed its advent. Relations with the United States are presumably going to improve very much in the near future, because the present set-up in India is in keeping with the Carter Administration's emphasis on human rights and democratic norms. The alliance with Moscow might cool off, although the feeling is that Morarji Desai will opt for a more honest non-alignment than that professed by Indira Gandhi.

STUDENT JANATA SUPPORTERS IN VICTORY DANCE



RUCHIR JOSHI/SOL

BABU JAGJIVAN RAM. THE NEW DEFENSE MINISTER

Desai and his Cabinet will have to remember that power ought to be used in judicious measure. They will have to remember the example of Mrs. Gandhi and her advisers, and the mess they landed themselves in. The diversity of the government's constituents may very well act as a check on excessive domination by any one school of thought. It might even lead, later on, to a sharp division of ambitions and opinions. For the present, there is one big question being asked: Will the Indian electorate's faith in the new government be justified?

CHAITANYA KALBAG

The New Economic Deal

The Janata Party's economic program envisages:

1. Deletion of property as a fundamental right.
2. Affirmation of the right to work and a full employment strategy.
3. Stress on Gandhian values of austerity, antyodya and a decentralized economy.
4. An end to destitution within ten years.
5. Appropriate technology for self-reliance.
6. New planning priorities—notably, the primacy of agriculture, agrarian reforms and more favorable terms of trade and higher allocations for the rural sector.
7. Narrowing down of rural-urban disparities and a new rural-urban nexus.
8. Emphasis on wage goods production for mass consumption.
9. Statutory reservation of spheres of production for small-scale and cottage industries.
10. Wages and prices policy—raising the minimum tax exemption limit to Rs. 10,000 and exemption of land revenue on all holdings below 2.5 hectares.
11. Redistributive taxation and excise in lieu of sales tax.
12. Formulation of a national water policy and a national energy policy.
13. Environmental care.

