



ELECTIONS 1977: AN UNCERTAIN PICTURE

MRS GANDHI Vs. THE CHALLENGERS

SPEAKING about the 1971 elections to a *Newsweek* correspondent, Mrs. Indira Gandhi had said: "I am the real issue in this election." In 1977, too, it is she who is the real issue. Her challengers' election manifestos say hardly anything new, except that they vow to 'wipe out' the 'scourges' of the Emergency. 320 million Indian voters are thus confronted with a hotch-potch of ideologies. The final issue may depend on the old question: Who will occupy the driver's seat?

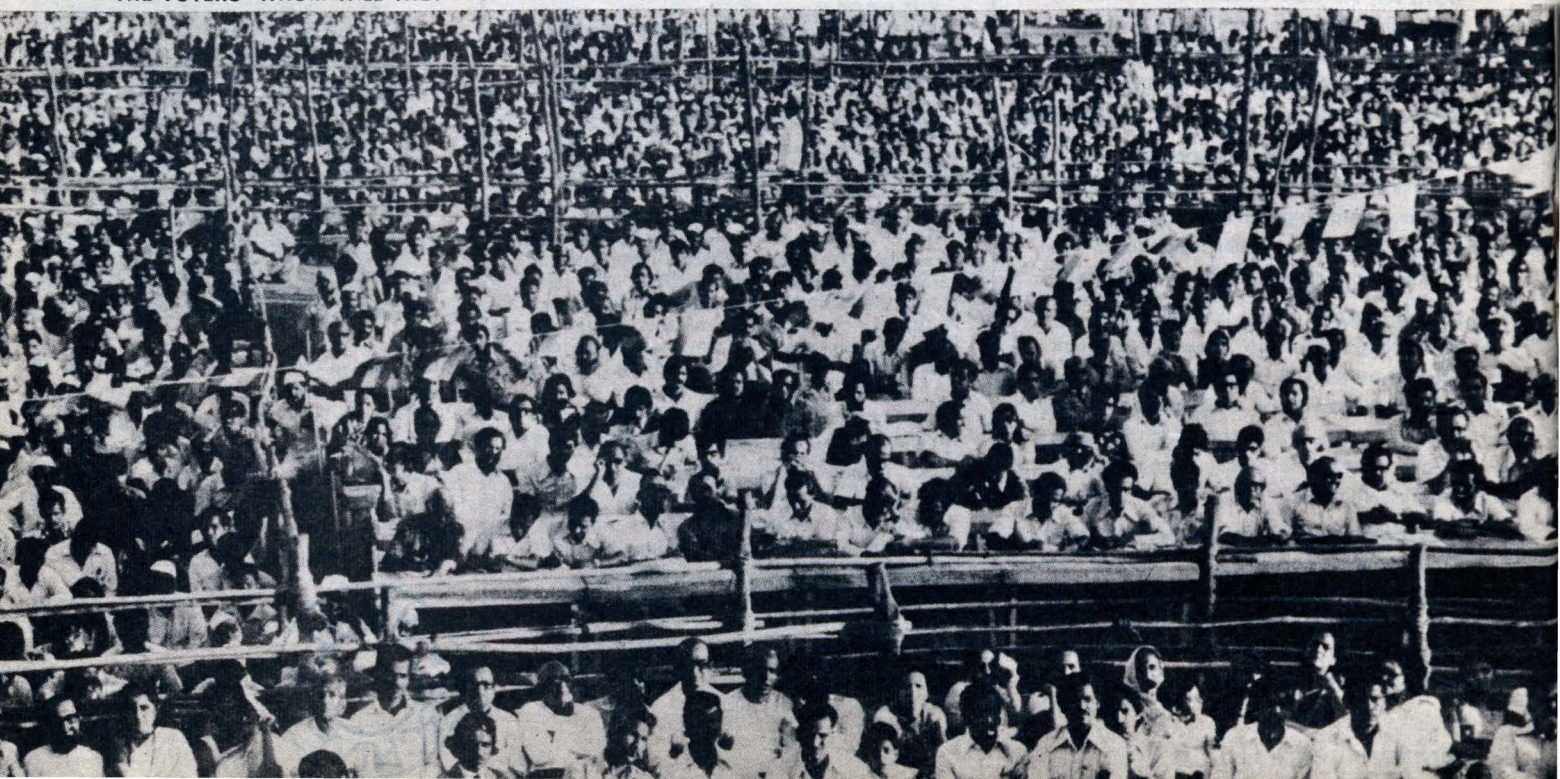
Political stalwarts from diverse backgrounds, the Prime Minister's opponents are all individualists, each possessing qualities that do not brook interference with, or sharing of, political power. Yet, these persons have seemingly sunk their differences, and will contest the coming elections under a com-

mon banner. Morarji Desai, 81 and a staunch Gandhian, is a moralist who is willing to die for *satyagraha*. He was in detention throughout the Emergency, and was released on January 18 this year. Atal Behari Vajpayee of the Jana Sangh is a fiery orator, given to touches of theater. The Jana Sangh has been an avowedly Hindu party, and has often been accused of stirring up communal dissent. Jayaprakash Narayan, the ailing and uncrowned leader of the Opposition, is another Gandhian, intensely committed to *Sarvodaya*. Morarji's Congress (O), Vajpayee's Jana Sangh, Charan Singh's Bharatiya Lok Dal, and the Socialist Party have merged into the Janata Party. A welcomed addition to the Opposition's ranks has been Jagjivan Ram's Congress For Democracy, which was created on February 2 after Ram's resignation

from the Cabinet and the ruling party.

The ruling Congress Party has had to refurbish many of its ideals. Confronted with reverses like Ram's resignation and the 'desertion' of Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, the Congress has had to reluctantly shelve some of its favorite programs, and adopt new ones. Ram's exit, in particular, resulted in a setback to the hopes of the Youth Congress, which had demanded, reportedly, 200 seats in the Lok Sabha. Elder Congressmen, most of them sitting members of Parliament, were hastily allotted tickets, and the "fresh blood" was reduced. Youth Congress President Mrs. Ambika Soni has not been allotted a ticket. From an early complacency about the results of the elections, the Congress Party has thus swung into a vigorous campaign.

36 - THE VOTERS—WHOM WILL THEY PLUMP FOR?





JAGJIVAN RAM—ROCKING THE CONGRESS BOAT

The March polls will be crucial to the ruling party. If it is returned to power, it will mean that the nation endorses all its actions, including the Emergency. If the voters do not return the Congress Party to power, it will mean a vindication of the Opposition's allegation that democracy was imperiled in the last 19 months.

The dice are still loaded in the ruling party's favor, although key States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (where CFD leaders H. N. Bahuguna and Jagjivan Ram enjoy widespread support) Orissa, (Nandini Satpathy's territory) Gujarat (Morarji's home State), Tamil Nadu (the Karunanidhi DMK's stronghold) and Kerala (where CPI leader Achutha Menon has announced his retirement from

MORARJI DESAI—READY TO DIE FOR 'SATYAGRAHA'



politics) appear to be doubtful. These States have a total of 245 seats in the Lok Sabha.

History is on the side of the ruling party — it has won all five preceding General Elections with a comfortable majority. For all practical purposes, therefore, India has had a one-party government ever since she gained Independence in 1947.

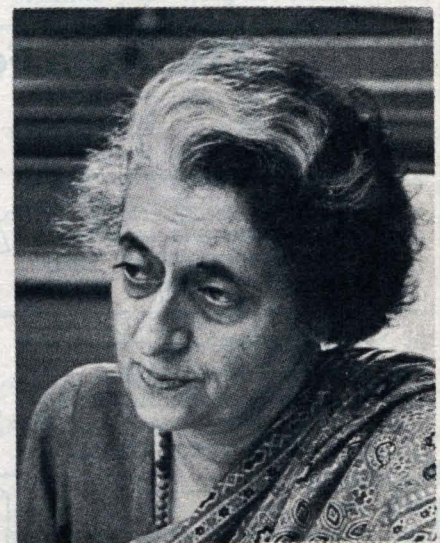
Mrs. Gandhi's challengers have taken up the war-cry of "Democracy versus Dictatorship." The ruling party is stumping on its achievements, its record, its constancy. Both sides swear by democracy, secularism and socialism. Both sides want poverty out, equality in, hunger out, plenty in, dependency out, self-sufficiency in. Implicit in all this sloganeering is the fact that India is still an underdeveloped nation, and that India is still a democracy in adolescence.

The Janata Party complained right at the beginning of the campaign that it had very little time in which to recoup its forces, reach a consensus on its platform, and present the voters with its manifesto. Most of the Opposition's members had either been in prison or had been rendered purposeless during the Emergency. The Opposition's financial resources are badly depleted. It will be a comparatively austere election for the challengers. Above all, the Opposition's grouse that it has not been allowed to present its viewpoints to the nation during the Emergency, holds some water. Sustained invective does have a percolatory effect.

The Opposition is fighting the elections on the main platform of all that happened during the last 19 months. Opposition leaders demand, at rally after rally, that the voters exercise their franchise to remove all traces of 'authoritarianism'. "When you stamp your vote, you will also stamp yours and the country's fate," said Jayaprakash Narayan. Opposition candidates who were imprisoned during the Emergency will, in addition, enjoy a sympathy that stems from the traditional Indian reverence for politicians who have gone to jail — a legacy of the freedom struggle. Then, there have been candidates like Subramaniam Swamy and Ram Jethmalani, who were in self-

imposed exile abroad, and who have now returned home to fight for "freedom and democracy".

The Congress Party, on the other hand, has to its advantage a well-oiled campaigning machinery, abundant funds, and the assurance that arises from power. Its approach is basically one of speed, and oratory. The Congress candidates have a strong economy in their favor, too — good foodgrain stockpiles, impressive Rupee strength, a cheerful balance of payments, and unparalleled foreign-exchange reserves. The Congress Party can claim to have achieved all this during the Emergency, albeit with the help of some 'authoritarianism'. Two beneficent monsoons and the absence



MRS GANDHI—'I AM THE ISSUE'

of thorny political dissent have helped, too.

But the Congress Party has made a slip here and there, and the eager Opposition has pounced on each one. Mrs. Gandhi inexplicably released political detenus in a trickle, thereby affording each one the chance to hog some limelight. Maharashtra Chief Minister S. B. Chavan's statement that in any other country, "bullets would be in store for those bent on disrupting the unity of the nation", and Defense Minister Bansi Lal saying in Ambala that "the Government apologizes to the masses for compulsory sterilization and in future coercive methods will not be adopted", have added fuel to the Opposition's fire. The nation's urban intelligentsia has been more

320 MILLION VOTERS

How Many Zeros?

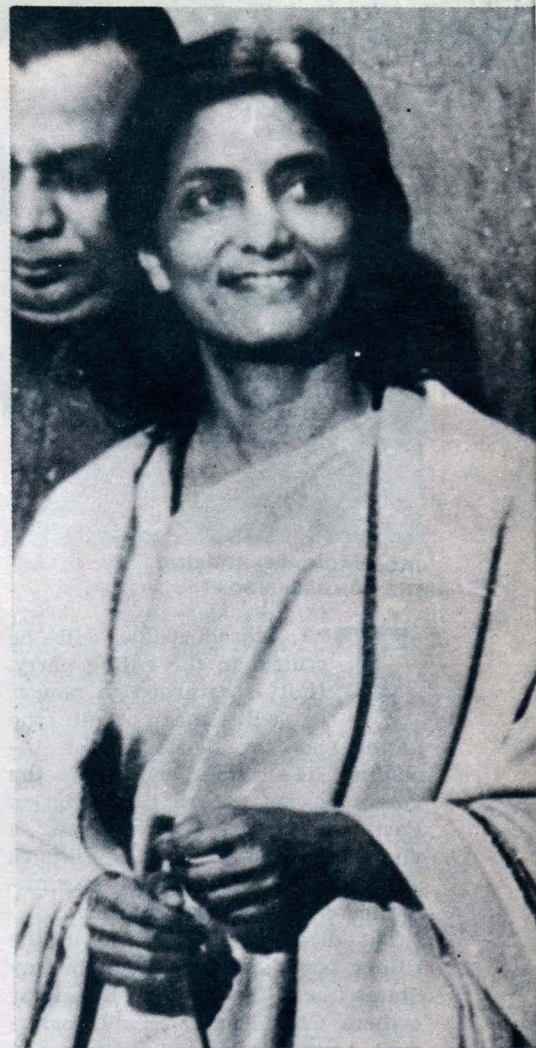
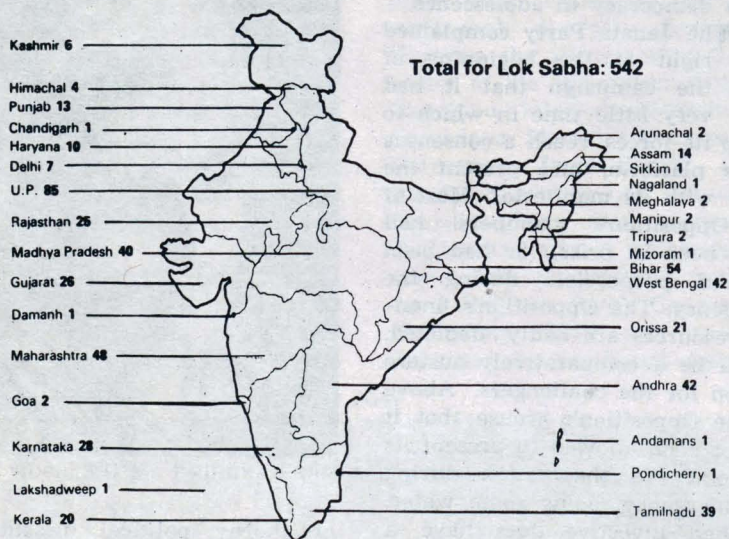
Elections this March will be held for 542 parliamentary seats—20 more than in 1971 because of the delimitation of the constituencies. There will be no additional constituencies till 2001, since the Government has decided to freeze the number of seats in Parliament. (After every census, there is a constitutional obligation to redraw constituencies according to the population).

Around 13 million new voters have been added to the electoral rolls. The Indian electorate is now the world's largest: 320 million.

Over 1.5 million officials will conduct the poll, and there will be roughly 350,000 polling stations.

Polling will be held on four days—March 16, 18, 19 and 20. The counting of votes will commence at 8 a.m. on March 20 in respect of all constituencies in which polling has been completed before that day, and counting of votes in remaining constituencies will commence at 8 a.m. on March 21. The Election Commission hopes that the results for all constituencies will be declared by March 22.

The Race For The Seats



NANDINI SATPATHY-WILL ORISSA FOLLOW HER LEAD?

personal charisma is the biggest factor in the ruling party's favor. She has been making lightning progress through several States in the last few days, addressing quite a few meetings each day. She, and the Congress Party, stress that the Congress government has been running the country more or less competently during the last 11 years. "I feel deeply that it (Congress) is the only party which has played a role in the making of modern India," said Mrs. Gandhi, releasing the Congress manifesto. She went on to describe herself as the "foremost *sevika* (servant) of the people".

Frequent defections from one side to the other have had their impact on candidates' morale. Cartoonist Abu Abraham commented on February 20: "As I see it, the choice is between democracy and defectorship." Jagjivan's and Mrs. Pandit's transference of loyalties, moreover, will no doubt have a

or less critical of the Emergency. Large sections of the rural population — Harijans, 'Muslims and other depressed classes, are rumored to have been the target of forced sterilizations. All these mistakes loom against the Congress Party, and have provided the Opposition with a ready-made *cause célèbre*.

The Janata Party's manifesto is described as a 'Gandhian alternative' that assures the people both 'bread and liberty'. It says that the record of the last ten years has been one of 'failures and stagnation'. The Opposition is concentrating on the rural electorate, which comprises roughly 80 per cent of the total

voters. It is these sections of the population that can be most easily swayed by emotion and elocution. For instance, *The Indian Express* reported that in Sanjay Gandhi's Amethi constituency, the "Congress boys are going round in jeeps shouting 'Sanjay Gandhi Zindabad', while the Janata boys are moving from village to village on bicycles with only *chana* (gram) in their pockets to sustain them." The Opposition has deliberately assumed the role of the underdog in the approaching contest.

The Congress manifesto is based on three aims: "poverty must go, disparity must diminish, and injustice must end." Mrs. Gandhi's

The Janata Party has adopted a political charter which contains 19 steps to "generate fearlessness and to revive democracy." The Party pledges, if it wins the approaching elections, to:

1. Lift the Emergency.
2. Restore the fundamental freedoms that have been suspended by a presidential order.
3. Repeal the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), release all political detenus and review all other unjust laws.
4. Enact laws to ensure that no political or social organization is banned without an independent judicial enquiry.

5. Seek to rescind the 42nd Constitution Amendment Act.

6. Move to amend Article 356 to ensure that the power to impose President's rule in the States is not misused to benefit the ruling party or any favored faction within it.

7. Amend Article 352 of the Constitution to prevent its abuse in the interest of an individual or group.

8. Introduce electoral reforms after a careful consideration of suggestions made by various Committees including the Tar-kunde Committee and in particu-



THE JANATA PARTY SYMBOL

lar consider proposals for recall of errant Legislators and for reducing election costs.

9. Repeal the amendment to the Representation of the People's Act which redefines corrupt practices and places electoral offences by certain individuals beyond the scrutiny of the courts.

10. Re-establish the rule of law.

11. Restore the authority of the judiciary and safeguard the independence and integrity of the Court.

12. Ensure that all individuals,

including those who hold high office, are equal before law.

13. Assure the right to peaceful and non-violent protest.

14. Abolish censorship and end all harassment of newspapers, journals, publishers and printing presses.

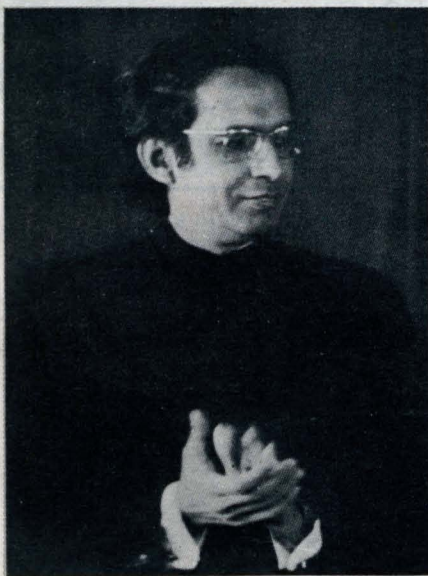
15. Safeguard the freedom of the Press by repealing the Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Act, and restore the immunity that the Press previously enjoyed in reporting legislative proceedings.

16. Ensure that All India Radio, Doordarshan (TV) and the Films Division are converted into genuinely autonomous bodies that are politically objective and free from governmental interference.

17. Ensure that news agencies are completely independent of the Government and are not given the right to monopoly.

18. Delete property from the list of fundamental rights and affirm the right to work.

19. Ensure that Government employees are not victimized, are freed of political pressure, and are not compelled to execute illegal orders and unlawful actions. Their right of access to courts will be restored.



VIDYA CHARAN SHUKLA-I & B MINISTER

psychological impact on the voters. And the mood of the electorate is unpredictable. But there is no doubt that the March elections will witness an unprecedented turnout of voters — a revived interest in the electoral process, sharply in contrast with the indifference of earlier elections, was evident in the

thousands of people who registered themselves as new voters. The battle promises to be a close and keenly-fought one.

The stakes are at an all-time high in the 1977 Elections. Charged with the passion of the Opposition's campaign, and the determination of the ruling party to remain in power, the contest has never been so exciting. The unification of the Opposition factions has led to stronger challenges. In the 1971 elections, there were 15 political parties contesting 520 seats. Now, half the number will contest 542 seats, with most of the Opposition parties having agreed on electoral adjustments which preclude the fielding of too many candidates. The Janata Party, where it is not fielding candidates, has left the field open to candidates belonging to its allies: the Congress For Democracy, the DMK, the Communist Party (Marxist) and the Akali Dal. The Congress Party has fielded a larger number of candidates, and left the rest of the constituencies to its allies in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. Strangely

enough, the Communist Party of India, (CPI) is siding with the Congress in West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, with the Congress For Democracy in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa, and is going it alone in other States. But the stakes remain clear through all this: a majority in the Lok Sabha (a two-thirds majority for either side seems improbable.)

Janata Party chairman Morarji Desai is standing for election from the Surat constituency in Gujarat, against Jaswant Chauhan of the Congress, and two other independents. A. B. Vajpayee will contest from Delhi South constituency against Shashi Bhushan of the Congress and four independents. In the Bombay North-West constituency, Law Minister H. R. Gokhale is pitted against Ram Jethmalani, and four independents. Jethmalani is a former president of the Bar Council of India.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Vidya Charan Shukla will face two rivals in the Raipur constituency, and Minister for Communications S. D. Sharma faces two

Old Man Giver



74 year old Jayaprakash Narayan, familiarly known as JP, has emerged as the Opposition's father-figure. One of the foremost leaders of the Sarvodaya movement, a Gandhian legacy that is presided over by Acharya Vinoba Bhave, JP entered the political arena, and the Opposition's front ranks, only in

early 1974. In that year, his movement demanding the resignation of the Congress government in Bihar catapulted him into newspaper headlines.

Born in 1902 in Bihar, JP went to California in 1922 to study there, and returned to India in 1929, a confirmed Marxist. He was actively involved in the freedom struggle and closely associated with Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and other nationalist leaders. In 1952, JP gave up Marxism for Sarvodaya, and dedicated the next few years to *Bhoodan*, the Vinoba-founded movement which had resulted in thousands of landlords donating portions of their property to the landless peasantry. From time to time, JP spoke out strongly on issues on which the government preferred to be uncommitted, and earned for himself the description of "the nation's conscience-keeper". In 1971, JP was responsible for one of the largest surrenders of Madhya Pradesh's dreaded Robin Hoods, the dacoits. It was from that much-lauded achievement that he headed into his confrontation with the Bihar government in 1974, a confrontation that led to his being acknowledged as the premier political and moral opponent to Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

JP's Bihar agitation soon snowballed into a national move to dislodge the Congress government from power. Charging that democracy was in jeopardy, and that corruption and mismanagement was increasing alarmingly, he launched a 'people's movement', dedicated to Gandhian socialism and *satyagraha*, against the Indira government. JP's movement became an umbrella for the other Opposition factions in the country, who till then had been largely disunited and disarrayed. After the June 12, 1975 judgment by the Allahabad High Court, which virtually unseated Mrs. Gandhi, JP announced a massive civil-disobedi-

JAYAPRAKASH, SOON AFTER HE WAS MANHANDLED DURING BIHAR AGITATION, 1974



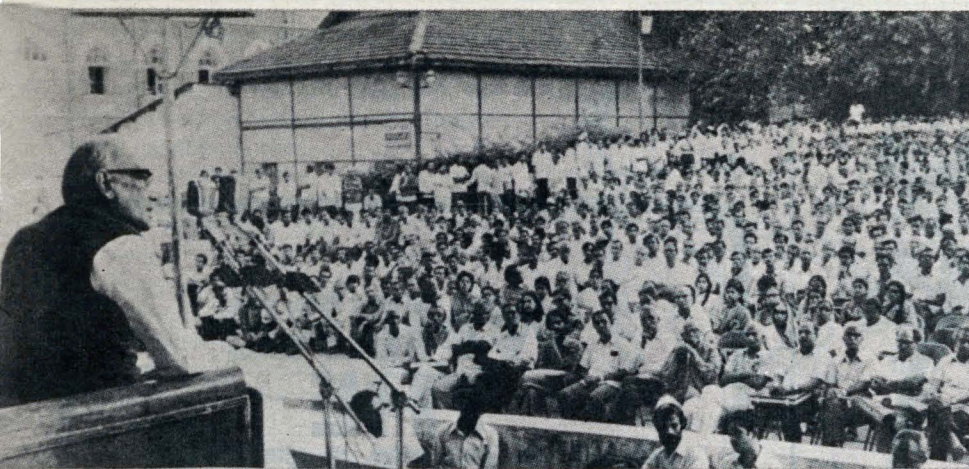
rivals in the Bhopal constituency. External Affairs Minister Y. B. Chavan is involved in a four-cornered contest in the Satara constituency in Maharashtra. Defense Minister Bansi Lal will face two opponents in the newly-formed Bhiwani constituency in Haryana.

Mrs Gandhi will be facing her old rival, Raj Narain, the Janata nominee, in the Rae Bareilly constituency in Uttar Pradesh. She will have to contend with seven other independent candidates. In the adjoining Amethi constituency, Sanjay Gandhi will fight Ravindra Pratap of the Janata party, and two other independents.

And so the campaign nears its close. Party posters have begun appearing belatedly on walls, and election rallies are being convened all over the country. The theater

CELEBRATING SUPREME COURT VERDICT UPHOLDING MRS GANDHI'S ELECTION TO LOK SABHA, NOVEMBER 7 1975





ence campaign to force Mrs. Gandhi from office. What irked Mrs. Gandhi most of all was one of JP's statements, calling upon the army and the police to disobey orders. This call for a showdown is widely acknowledged to be the event that triggered off Mrs. Gandhi's clampdown on June 23, 1976, in the wake of which JP was imprisoned. He was, however, released from detention a few months later, his health having deteriorated. Even now, JP suffers from an acute kidney complaint, and his health precludes the possibility of his playing a major role in post-Election politics. Writing in *The Socialist Society* on February 4, he said: "I have not been keeping too well and cannot stay away from the dialyzer for more than two days at a time. But I will do whatever I can to make the peo-

ple realize how much is at stake in the coming general elections. All that has happened since June 26, 1975, shows that the choice is nothing less than between democracy and a fascist type of dictatorship." For the present, Jayaprakash Narayan appears to be content with being an adviser to the Opposition: it was at his insistence that the Janata Party was formed. He has repeatedly stressed that he does not aspire to any high political office.

On February 25, Jayaprakash was admitted for routine dialysis to Bombay's Jaslok Hospital. There, doctors decided to confine him to bed for at least a week, because the 'shunt' through which dialysis is done required attention. JP later issued a press statement announcing the cancellation of all his public engagements for the three

ensuing weeks, "owing to reasons of health".

Jayaprakash's absence from the campaigning scene will mean a big loss to the Opposition challenge. It is his charisma that has attracted vast crowds at rallies he addressed prior to his hospitalization. He has also been acknowledged by Opposition leaders to be their major unifying factor. With him gone from their active ranks, the Opposition's fire might falter, and the ruling party may gain a big advantage.

JAYAPRAKASH WITH MORARJI
DISCUSSING JANATA MANIFESTO



of the battle has shifted from Delhi, where so far the allotment of tickets and the formulation of policies had claimed attention, to the constituencies, where the candidates are wooing the voters with a fervor and a feverishness tinged with the knowledge that March 16 is not very far off.

For the majority of the electorate, however, there will hardly be any difference between the Opposition's "bread and liberty" slogan and the ruling party's "bread before liberty" slogan. The dividing line may arise only on touchy issues like sterilization. If Mrs. Gandhi's challengers remain on the Opposition benches in the new Lok Sabha, they will conceivably form a healthier counterbalance to the Government benches. If, on the other hand, they win the Elections, and form the new government, the

Congress Party has pledged, in the words of Congress President D. K. Borooah, that it will become "the President's loyal Opposition".

In the final reckoning, it's not whom one votes for that will matter. It's whom one *doesn't* vote for that will count.

CHAITANYA KALBAG

DEFENSE MINISTER
BANSI LAL-APOLOGETIC

RAM JETHMALANI-EXILE
RETURNED TO FACE GOKHALE

LAW MINISTER
H.R. GOKHALE

