



man of the masses

**Chaudhry
Charan
Singh**

R K Hooda



To
Respected
Ch. Bhagwan Singh
With regards

MAN OF THE MASSES

R. K. Hooda
25.12.84

CHAUDHRY CHARAN SINGH
FIRST PEASANT PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

By
R. K. HOODA

Published by

Chaudhry Hari Ram and Sons
Books and Newspaper Publisher
Hooda House, F 43, East of Kailash
New Delhi-110049

First Published 1979

© R. K. Hooda

Price Rs. 60.00

Cover Designer

Dilip Chowdhury Associates
New Delhi-110001

Printed at

Tara Art Press
B-4, Hans Bhawan
B.S. Zafar Marg
New Delhi-110002

Blayman



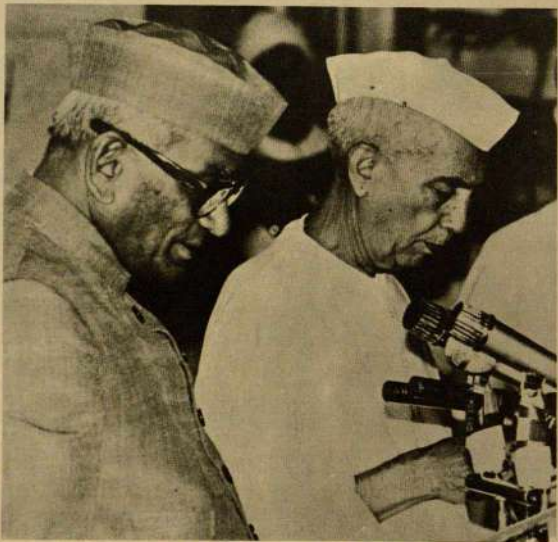
To
My revered father
Chaudhry Hari Ram

Handwritten signature

CHAUDHRY CHARAN SINGH'S PARENTS



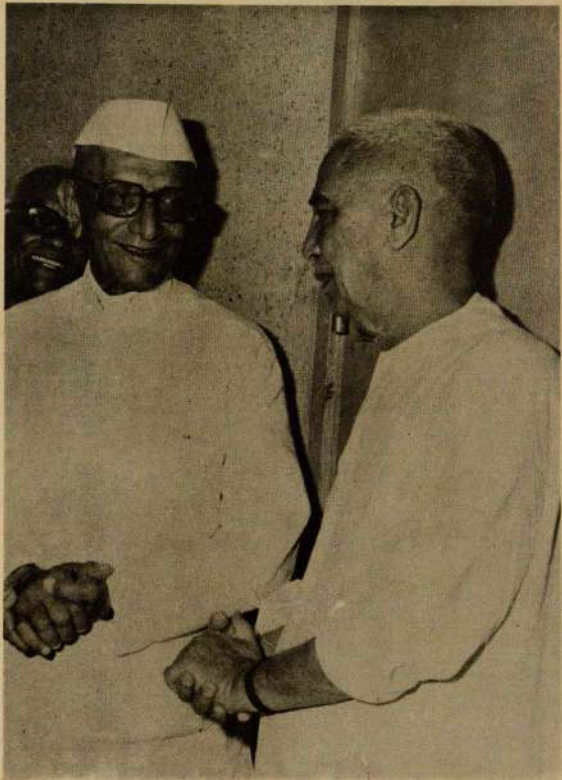
Chaudhry Mir Singh with his wife Mrs. Netri Devi



The President of India Mr. N. S. Reddy is administering the oath of office of Prime Minister to Chaudhry Charan Singh on July 28, 1979.



Chaudhry Charan Singh, the Prime Minister of India in his office in south block. Standing behind him are Steel Minister Mr. Biju Patnalk, Foreign Minister Mr. S. N. Mishra and Mr. Raj Narain.



The Prime Minister Mr. Desai called on the then Home Minister Mr. Charan Singh on May 29, 1979.



Chaudhry Charan Singh, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Mrs. Charan Singh and Chaudhry Devi Lal at Chaudhry's residence to celebrate the birth of grand son.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful and indebted to the following persons who inspired and helped me in bringing out this biography of Chaudhry Charan Singh. Without their help and active cooperation I was not in a position to bring out this volume within short period of one month.

Chaudhry Ram Sanahi Hooda, Shri Govind ji, Mr. Raj Gill, Mr. R. P. Puri and Mr. F. C. Puri.

I am particularly thankful to my printer Mr. S. N. Tara, Mrs. & Mr. Dilip Chowdhury who took lot of pains in the production and printing of this book.

Lastly I must mention here that my wife and my daughters Deepshikha, Nidhi and Prerna were a constant source of inspiration and encouragement to me in the completion of my long cherished desire of bringing out this book.

Radha Krishan Hooda

PREFACE

The Fall of the Desai Government and the emergence of the rural power spearhead by Chaudhry Charan Singh in July 1979 was such a momentous political event that only the posterity will be able to assess its significance. It will not be an exaggeration if one puts it as the second mile stone in the political history of India, the first having the independence.

Chaudhry Charan Singh's ascendancy to the office of the Prime Ministership will stand in history as an eloquent testimony to two facts, that is, that the rural power in India can no more be contained or treated as a casual factor in the political fabric of the country and that the democratic values still prevail over political ambitions.

Chaudhry Charan Singh's emergence to incontestable pre-eminence in India's public life has been a fairly extraordinary phenomenon. Few political analysts and commentators imagined that after Morarji Desai's exit Chaudhry Charan Singh will take over as Prime Minister of India. During the month of July political developments took sudden and swift dramatic turns.

Charan Singh's BLD group revolted against Morarji Desai Government and caused the downfall of 28 months old Janata Government. Desai resigned and decided to take political sanyas and Chaudhry Charan Singh was sworn in as the 5th Prime Minister of Republic of India on July 28, 1979.

It was then that a sudden need for a comprehensive and authentic account on the life of Chaudhry Charan Singh was felt. That is why this book. As a journalist I came in contact with the Chaudhry in 1967 when he became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. I have since then been closely watching his slow but steady progress. During this continued acquaintance of over a decade I have travelled with him extensively covering his day-to-day activities, including his election campaign. Friends, journalists and politicians have been suggesting me all along to write a biography of Chaudhry Charan Singh. It is this suggestion of theirs I am trying to fulfill. I feel today a sense of achievement in completing a delayed task.

Chaudhry Charan Singh has been a controversial political personality, he had to struggle relentlessly during his chequered career which is full of ups and downs. Although this book is small and volumes and volumes can be written on the life and achievements of Chaudhry Charan Singh, I have tried my best to present all the important events in his life and the historic role played from time to time. This book, I hope, will help the people who are keen to know and understand his political thought, his works and performance during his hectic political career spread over a span of over 50 years.

New Dehli
August 15, 1979.

R. K. Hooda

INTRODUCTION

A GLIMPSE OF CHAUDHRY CHARAN SINGH'S LIFE

At once a peasant; at once a patriot. The Prime Minister, Chaudhry Charan Singh, is much more than a mere politician. He is one of the builders of independent India. Cast in the mould of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Chaudhry first fought for the independence of the country and later to safeguard the same.

Those who know little about the background of the new leadership at the Centre should note that Chaudhry Charan Singh has not suddenly emerged, as if from nowhere, to be a great leader. The peasant in him as the Vice Chairman of the Janata Party straightway declared "I support Morarjibhai" at the helm. That is how the other contenders for the post of Prime Minister were pushed to the background and Mr Desai emerged victorious and Chaudhry became the king maker in March 1977.

Chaudhry Charan Singh, who was second in command in the Morarji Ministry, is an uncrowned king of the Indian peasantry. Though for long Uttar Pradesh remained the field of his political activity today the horizons of his field-work have widened and whole of the country demands his attention.

He was born in a poor peasant family in the village of Noorpur in Hapur tehsil of Meerut district in Uttar Pradesh on December 23, 1902. His father, Chaudhry Mir Singh, then lived in a mud hut (chhappar).

For his primary education Chaudhry Charan Singh was sent to school in a nearby village. Afterwards he moved to Meerut, where he passed his matriculation examination from the Government High School. To move up in the academic ladder he had to shift to Agra, where he did his B. Sc. from the Agra College. It is here that he passed his M.A. in History. Finally, he qualified LL.M. in 1925.

As he became a lawyer he began practice in Ghaziabad and got married to Gayatri Devi, an educated Jat girl of village Garhi Kundal in Rohtak district of Haryana. Mrs. Gayatri Devi takes active interest in politics and twice she was elected MLA to U.P. assembly from Aligarh and Mathura constituencies respectively. She played a significant role in making the Chaudhry what he is today. As a life partner she advised her husband at crucial moments. I know two occasions when Gayatri ji influenced Chaudhry Charan Singh in taking right decision at right time. Firstly when Chaudhry resigned from the Congress in 1965 and secondly when he rejoined the Desai Government as senior Deputy Prime Minister with finance as portfolio. Mrs. Gayatri Devi is not only the Chaudhry's devoted wife but she is providing a great helping hand to the Prime Minister to discharge his duties. She also takes care of his health and also meet people who call on the Prime Minister when he does not find time to meet all of them owing to his very busy schedule.

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Chaudhry Charan Singh went to jail four times. He first courted arrest in Salt Satyagrah in 1932. In 1940 he joined the "non-cooperation movement" and was arrested in 1942 he was again jailed for joining the "Quit India Movement". Came the emergency of 1975 and he was detained under "MISA" by Mrs Indira Gandhi's Government and was lodged in Tehar jail for about a year.

Chaudhry Charan Singh became twice Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the largest state of India, first by revolting against the central leadership of the Congress party in 1967 and again in 1969 when he formed a Ministry of Bharatiya Kranti Dal, with the support of Mrs. Gandhi. He was elected to U.P. Legislative Assembly as early as 1937 from his home constituency Chhiprauli and since then he has been consistently contesting the same seat in every general election.

Paul Brass, an American author, wrote in his book, "Faction Politics in Indian States" that Chaudhry Charan Singh currently Agriculture Minister in U.P. Government has dominated the District Congress and district Politics since the early forties and successfully resisted serious challenges to his leadership during his long rule. "Chaudhry Sahib" as he is reverentially called by his followers, has been an unusually successful faction leader in U.P. politics. Inspired less by desire for power than by an invincible belief in the rightness of his actions and policies Charan Singh seeks neither friends nor favours and gives no quarter to those who oppose him. A look at the elements of Charan Singh's power will throw more light on the requirements for factional leadership and political influence in contemporary U.P. Politics.

"Charan Singh is not exactly an intellectual in politics, but he is well-read man with an incisive intelligence, which he has devoted to a continuing study of agricultural problems in U.P. Charan Singh is the leading ideologist in U.P. of the Peasant-proprietor. As a prominent member of the U.P. Zamindari Abolition Committee, he worked hard to ensure that the Zamindari Abolition Act would contain no loopholes, which would permit the continued domination of Zamindar's in the rural economy of the state and to make certain that landlordism may not raise its ugly head again. In his most recent publication 'Joint Forming X-Rayed' the problems and its solution, Charan Singh has opposed partly on technical grounds, but also because of his belief in the values of peasant-proprietorship—in the new Government policy of fostering Co-operative Farming."

Chaudhry Charan Singh is convinced that it is the peasants who are the sources of Indian industrial workers, it is the peasants who constitute the main market for Indian industry, it is the peasants who are the main sources of Indian Army, so the peasantry is the biggest political force in India, but so far the Indian peasantry has been exploited by a handpicked shrewd urban clique which has been ruling India since independence. Unless the farmers, who constitute 80 per cent of India's population come at the helm of affairs, India cannot progress".

Chaudhry Charan Singh assured the people of India in his election speeches that if Janata Party, of which he was the Vice Chairman, was voted to power, it would give "an

INTRODUCTION

honest and efficient administration". It would take ruthless measures against all public servants found guilty of corruption, inefficiency or discrimination. He said "I would like public servants to be well paid and trusted."

As for as corruption among politicians, Mr. Charan Singh says, "like sacrifices, corruption also starts at the top and percolates down. It then corrupts the whole society. Unless there is high degree of personal integrity at the top in public life, corruption in administration cannot be stamped out. The party, therefore, will adopt special procedures and established special agencies which will take automatic legal notice of complaints and institute inquiries into charges of corruption against all non-officials, who may be placed in positions of responsibility, particularly ministers and legislators".

Chaudhry Charan Singh is undoubtedly a man of iron-will and strong likes and dislikes. He promised through the manifesto of Janata Party that he would give bread, liberty and clean administration to the people of India; and the people in return reposed full faith in him by giving a thumping majority to Janata Party in the recent elections and routed the ruling Congress. Mr. Charan Singh seems impatient and is serious and sincere to root out corruption in the country.

Chaudhry Charan Singh with his clean past and a clear vision is looking for the day, when India will be known as a clean society. He jocularly says, "My dream or aim is not marxist, nor maoist but Indian and therefore Gandhian.



Chandbhai Charan Singh with the delegates of the British House of Commons Select Committee, led by Mr. Menamara in New Delhi on February 8, 1979.



The then Deputy Prime Minister Chaudhry Charan Singh in discussion with Comrade A. N. Kosygin during his state visit in New Delhi on March 10, 1979.



The Prime Minister with the Author and his daughter Deepshikha in the lawns of P.M.'s House.



Prime Minister Chaudhry Charan Singh with the Author Mr. R. K. Hooda

1

AN ASSESSMENT

EMINENT men who have left an indelible mark in the annals of history generally have been the most controversial persons of their times. Socrates, Galileo, Marx and in very recent times Mahatma Gandhi had become the butt of criticism by their adversaries, like gold which becomes more and more precious with every beating it gets, controversies and criticism have moulded these men into perfect souls. Criticism by their detractors is more an indication of their inner strength and growing popularity rather than reflection of their unacceptability to the society. Judged by these standards Chaudhry Charan Singh, the new Prime Minister of India, is among the most controversial leaders in the country today. His detractors would like to find fault with him for everything he does good for lasting. Yet even his critics would admit that he is among the very few leaders in the country who enjoy a high

degree of reputation and command great following among the people. Truly, he can be called Man of the Masses who is immensely loved and respected by the people living in rural India.

It is by no means an easy task to attempt an reassessment of a person with whom one is closely associated. Personal prejudices and predilections are bound to cast their shadows. One is likely to be accused of exaggerating certain aspects or tending to ignore the most important aspects of a person's character due to the close proximity. But an honest attempt is not bad.

Chaudhry Charan Singh is perhaps the most misrepresented, misunderstood and misinterpreted leader today. To his innumerable admirers, he is a great leader : honest, straight-forward, simple, sincere,

full of compassion and good humour. But to those who have not had the opportunity of personal contact with him and have formed a picture based on newspaper reports or hearsay he is a parochial person who never forgives and forgets his enemies. He is also being accused as a person of vindictive nature. Chaudhry Charan Singh's political opponents and critics also try to tarnish his image by calling him anti-Harijan, casteist and woman hater. However, one thing on which everybody agrees is that Chaudhry Charan Singh is a man of integrity and incorruptible. Any person who comes into contact with him and gets an opportunity of knowing him intimately soon revises the opinion and joins the band of his admirers.

Chaudhry Charan Singh is not a man born great nor was greatness thrust on him. He has acquired the highest office of Prime Ministership of this country by dint of hard work, sustained struggle and sincere efforts. In achieving his objectives he never compromised on principles. To him both the ends and means are equally sacrosanct : neither of them can be sacrificed for the sake of either. Influenced by the teachings of Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Mahatma Gandhi, Chaudhry Charan Singh has acquired the qualities of tolerance and commitment to principles. While he would be ruthless in defending a just cause and upholding principles he can never become vindictive. In his entire political career of more than 50 years there has never been a single instance of his taking recourse to vendetta even against those who have caused harm to him. During his long political career Chaudhry Charan Singh tried to build several leaders in U.P., Haryana, Bihar, Gujarat, Delhi, Rajasthan, MP, Punjab and in other parts of the country. After achieving high political offices from the Chaudhry, several so-called

leaders ditched and deserted him. I asked the Chaudhry once that his choice of persons was very poor as many of them after gaining political benefits left him and thus proved disloyal to him. The Chaudhry said : "I consider my colleagues, co-workers, partymen and associates as sincere, faithful and loyal; if they desert me to achieve their selfish ends I cannot help it. I have been ditched, and deserted by several persons during my political career of 50 years. There is a great scarcity of good, loyal and faithful persons in today's politics."

Critics of Chaudhry Charan Singh have described him as a Jat leader and a regional leader even though it has been proved beyond doubt that his following is drawn from practical by all sections of the society and his influence extends to most states of the country. In fact his close associates are drawn mostly from other communities than his own. In spite of the fact that his following extends to all classes and castes and the vast majority of them belong to the economically weaker and socially backward sections, his critics prefer to brand him as a kulak leader. This perhaps is a reflection of the fear complex from which his adversaries suffer.

Chaudhry Charan Singh's commitment is to the principles and not individuals. Even at the time he joined the political movement in the early twenties he was influenced by the teachings of Swami Dayanand and Mahatma Gandhi. He has had an opportunity of learning a lot from the teachings of his mentors which also included Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel whom he considered his friend, philosopher and guide. The sitting and study room of Chaudhry Charan Singh is decorated with big portraits of the Swamy, Mahatma and Sardar who have influenced greatly the New Prime Minister of India Chaudhry Charan Singh.

In his political career he has always endeavoured to uphold principles and has always opposed individual worship. He exhorts his innumerable admirers to pursue the politics of principles and not of individuals. Those close to him know well how very unhappy he was when the idea was mooted to celebrate his birthday. But he could not disappoint his innumerable followers who wanted to utilise the occasion to ventilate the grievances of the Kisans who are the backbone of the country. In fact he has been urging his supporters to celebrate the Kisan Day on a day other than his birthday. He has suggested that October 30, the birthday of Sardar Patel, the symbol of Indian peasantry would be the most appropriate date for the Kisan Day.

Chaudhry Charan Singh takes success and defeat in the same stride. It is his firm conviction that Truth ultimately prevails and hence temporary setbacks do not demoralise him. Power has never lured Chaudhry Charan Singh. He has not hesitated to give up office whenever he realised that the principles were at stake. Chaudhry Charan Singh is known as one politician in the country who keeps his resignation in his pocket. His resignation as senior Deputy Prime Minister from the Desai Government was his 12th resignation during his 50 years of political career.

As a result of his firm conviction, hard work, sincere efforts ceaseless struggle Chaudhry Charan Singh achieved his long-cherished ambition of becoming Prime Minister of India. The Chaudhry after the 1977 election came on the National scene with a bang and in quick succession went on rising the political ladder causing surprise after surprise to his rivals. In 1977 he became Home Minister and after sometime left the Desai Government to

rejoin it in early 1979 as the senior Deputy Prime Minister. Finally after a brief spell in that position. On July 28, 1979 the Chaudhry was sworn in as first Prime Minister from rural India.

From a small Vakil in Ghaziabad Chaudhry Charan Singh proved to the world that a son of a poor farmer can also become Prime Minister of this country. This is considered to be the great achievement of historic importance in the political history of India.

Chaudhry Charan Singh's has been a steady progress. When he moved from Ghaziabad, a tehsil of Meerut district headquarters he carried with him his following in the tehsil. When he shifted to Lucknow, the state capital of U.P. in 1940 he again took with him the entire mass following not only in the district, but of the region which he acquired during his years of service in the area. It is this following that has sustained him in politics in fair and foul weather. This is clearly borne out by the fact that when Chaudhry Charan Singh left the Congress in 1967 he could carry with him only 16 MLAs. But when a mid-term poll was held in 1969 his party secured 99 seats. Again in 1974 elections his party secured 106 seats. The Lok Sabha elections of March 1977 decisively proved the following Chaudhry Charan Singh commanded in the whole of north India.

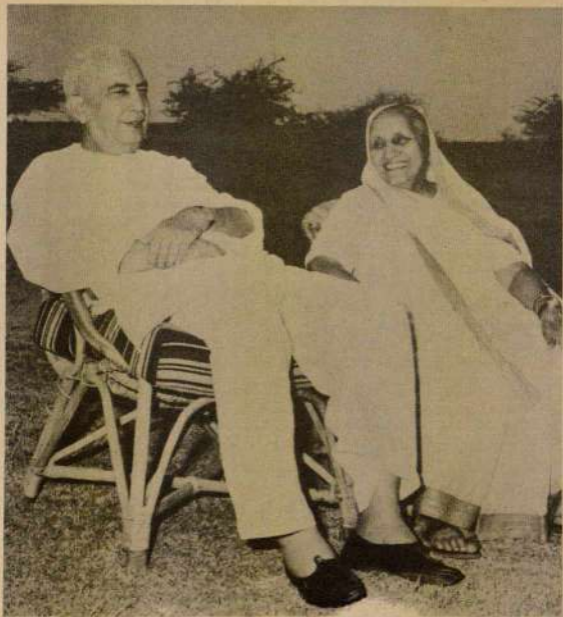
Born in a kisan family Chaudhry Charan Singh strongly advocates the cause of the peasants. He believes that a healthy and strong peasantry is of primary importance to the development of an agricultural country like India. At the same time he has great compassion for the poor and down-trodden in the urban areas as well. It is his conviction that unless

the villages are developed and the poorest in the village is provided the opportunity to play his role in the activities of the nation India's economic development would remain a myth. He favours the full utilisation of the irrigable land in the country. As a person wedded to Gandhian principles Chaudhry Charan Singh favours agro-based industries. But he is not opposed to big industry. He feels that the big industries should play a role complementary to the farming sector.

Chaudhry Charan Singh is essentially a man of the masses. He has an uncanny knack of judging the mood of the masses and taking his decisions. He keeps his eyes and ears open and listens to what others have to say. He is a man of very few words and whenever he speaks he does so meaningfully and with firm conviction. Chaudhry Charan Singh was able to sense the people's disenchantment with the Congress when the other leaders did not have the faintest idea of the things to come. Having correctly diagnosed the ills Chaudhry

Charan Singh turned to find the cure for the same. He soon came to the conclusion that the creation of a national alternative capable of taking over from the Congress was the only solution to India's ills. It is towards the fulfilment of this programme that he decided in 1967 to break away from the Congress with which he has had more than four decades of connection. It was a painful decision, but the future if the nation was of greater importance than sentiment. His adversaries did not hesitate to denounce him for this. But time proved that Chaudhry Charan Singh had taken the right decision. Like a true kisan who can smell the weather Chaudhry Charan Singh smells the people's sentiments long before others can do so.

It is Chaudhry Charan Singh's era. For the first time a farmer's son has taken over destinies of the nation. The people have high hopes in him. It is yet to be seen how the new Prime Minister shapes the future of this great country.



Chaudhry Charan Singh Prime Minister of India with his wife Mrs. Gayatri Devi seen relaxing at Suraj Kund in Haryana.



Mrs. and Chaudhry Charan Singh are seen with Mrs. Indira Gandhi at a grandson birthday party hosted by the Chaudhrys on January 7, 1979.



Chaudhry Charan Singh addressing IPS trainees in New Delhi on May 19, 1977.



Chaudhry Charan Singh receiving King of Bhutan who visited India on April 1, 1977.

PERSONALIA

Early Life & Family History

CHAUDHRY Charan Singh was not born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth. On the contrary his parents belonged to a modest agriculturist family. His father Chaudhry Mir Singh was so poor a farmer that he could not even build himself a house. He lived in a hut (*CHHAPAR*). It was not that his ancestors had always lived in poverty. The hands of destiny had pushed them into a life of struggle. They belonged to the Tewatia ruling clan of Ballabgarh, now a developing industrial town in Haryana, near Faridabad. The Tewatias were known for their heroic exploits and were in the forefront of the struggle for the emancipation of the country from foreign rule. Raja Nahar Singh, the founder of the Tewatia kingdom was among the leaders who fought the first war of independence in 1857.

Gopal Singh Tewatia had come with a

few of his followers and settled in Sihi village, near Ballabgarh, in 1705. Murtaza Khan, the Moghul resident in Faridabad, who had come to know him, assigned him the work of collecting revenue in the division. Gopal Singh was to get a commission of one anna per rupee. After Gopal Singh's death, his nephew Charan Dass took over this job. But he was a man of a saintly disposition who devoted most of his time to prayer and distributed whatever he collected among the poor and needy people of the area. Since he failed to deposit the revenue in the treasury he was taken prisoner by the Moghul ruler. However, his son Balram Singh tactfully got him released and took refuge under Maharaja Suraj Mal of Bharatpur. Maharaja Suraj Mal exercised his influence with Murtaza Khan and secured for Balram Singh the five villages of Sihi, Bhuj, Mujahadi and Mirzapur.

Within a short time Balram Singh became a powerful chieftain of the area and started expanding his territory. He attacked Faridabad and seized 11 villages. He defeated the chieftain of Pali and annexed another 21 villages. He also successfully launched assaults on the rulers of Secunderabad and Palwal and annexed into his kingdom 88 villages belonging to the former and 98 villages belonging to the latter. Thus within a short period Balram Singh became the ruler of 223 villages and declared himself the Maharaja of Ballabgarh. He built the fort of Ballabgarh which even today stands testimony to the heroic exploits of its builders.

Raja Nahar Singh, a descendant of Balram Singh, was the most prominent ruler of Ballabgarh. He was among those who took part in India's first war of independence against the British in 1857. However, Nahar Singh was killed by the British in a deceitful manner. The British also resolved to massacre the kith and kin of the Ballabgarh rulers. Many relatives of the royal family had to flee from Ballabgarh and seek shelter in distant places. Among those who survived the onslaught was Badam Singh, grandfather of Chaudhry Charan Singh.

Badam Singh and his relatives fled to the east and settled in Bhatanna village in Bulandshahr district. The family lived in Bhatanna for several years. Badam Singh had five children; the eldest son was Lakhpat Singh and the youngest Mir Singh. Towards the turn of the twentieth century Chaudhry Mir Singh decided to seek his fortune elsewhere. He moved to Noorpur village in Meerut district along with his family members. He was only 18 years of age at that time. He managed to secure a piece of agricultural land under a share cropping arrangement.

As a result of the hard labour put in by the Chaudhry family, the land started yielding profits. The high productivity of the land attracted several offers for its purchase. The landlord was lured by them and decided to sell it. The Chaudhry family did not have the required money to buy the land. Hence it had to face eviction and look for fresh shelter. It was during its stay in Noorpur that a baby boy was born in Chaudhry Mir Singh's family on December 23, 1902. The boy was named Charan Singh by the happy and proud parents.

Charan Singh was just six years old when the family faced eviction from the land it had cultivated for more than a decade. Chaudhry Mir Singh set out in search of a new piece of land and was successful in securing a plot in Bhoopgarhi in Meerut district itself. He shifted to Bhoopgarhi with his family and his brothers settled down in the nearby Bhadaula village. After his 14 year's stay in Bhoopgarhi Chaudhry Mir Singh decided to leave the village for good to rejoin his brothers in Bhadaula village.

Chaudhry Mir Singh and his four brothers, Lakhpat Singh, Boota Singh, Gopal Singh and Raghbir Singh, were a closeknit family and were very affectionate towards each other. The five brothers had 15 children. The twenty members of the Chaudhry family loved and respected each other. Lakhpat Singh, the eldest of the brothers, immensely liked his nephew Charan Singh and did not favour the idea of living separately from him. It was at his insistence that Mir Singh decided to shift from Bhoopgarhi to Bhadaula. Only towards the early twenties could the family acquire some economic stability. In the year following the World War of 1914-18 a period of recession had set in the country. Prices of all commodities, particularly

agricultural produce, crashed. It was in such circumstances that a plot of a few acres of land was put up on sale. Agricultural land was sought after by the Chaudhry family. But the cost of the land, Rs. 21000, was beyond its means. However, by an agreement with the seller the Chaudhry family paid Rs. 7000 in cash—all the money it could mobilise—and mortgaged the land to its former owner till such time as the remaining amount was paid. Having acquired the land the family put up huts on it and worked hard to improve its yield. As a result of its hard labour and frugal habits the family was able to pay the debt in a short time and redeem the title of the land. Thus the family finally came to acquire land of its own.

Chaudhry Mir Singh had five children, Charan Singh, Ram Devi, Shyam Singh, Risalo and Man Singh. The first six years of Charan Singh's childhood were spent in Noorpur and his boyhood in Bhoopgarhi. Since Bhoopgarhi did not have a school, young Charan Singh was admitted to a primary school in Jaani village, a short distance from Bhoopgarhi. He evinced great interest in his studies right from the beginning. He was punctual in attending the school and after school hours he went to the fields to lend a helping hand to his father. In school he was a studious boy. He did not join his school mates in the pranks school children play. During the recess he would be found engrossed in reading in a secluded corner of the school. His teachers saw in him an unusual lad who would earn name and fame in life. After finishing primary education Charan Singh was admitted to the Government School, Meerut, for secondary education. He passed his matriculation examination in 1919 and the intermediate examination in 1921. With this his student life in Meerut came to an end.

After completing his Intermediate examination Charan Singh had once again to face uncertainty. His father whose means of livelihood were limited and who had the responsibility of bringing up four other children could not afford to send Charan Singh for higher studies. Charan Singh, aware of the family's circumstances, gave up the idea of further studies. But fate had ordained something different for him. His uncle Lakpat Singh who had an immense liking for him, was much pained to know that the boy was being asked to discontinue his education for reasons of financial difficulties. He had a firm conviction that his nephew would achieve greatness in his life. He did not want that a brilliant career should be cut short for want of money. He summoned Charan Singh and persuaded him to continue his education. He assured him of the necessary financial help as long as he required it.

Encouraged by his uncle's assurance Charan Singh went to Agra to continue his studies. He took his B.Sc degree in 1923, joining the M.A. and Law classes simultaneously. He secured the Master's degree as well as the Law degree in 1925. Having thus accomplished his ambition in education Charan Singh was once again at the cross-roads in choosing his career. With the qualifications he had acquired he could have secured a cushy bureaucratic post. But Charan Singh had his own ideas. Having experienced poverty and hardship he was determined to devote his energies to the betterment of the life of the poor and hardworking people, particularly the agriculturists. It was in the fulfilment of this mission that he decided to take up the legal profession. He enrolled himself as an advocate and chose the tehsil town of Ghaziabad as his field of activity.

Soon after he had completed his

education Chaudhry Charan Singh was married to Gayatri Devi, daughter of Chaudhry Ganga Ram, a leading Arya Samajist of Haryana and resident of village Garhi Kundal in the Sonapat tehsil of Rohtak district. Gayatri Devi who is popularly known as "Mataji" was educated at Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jullundur, and had participated in the activities of the Arya Samaj and in the Congress movement. She later joined active politics and was twice elected to the U.P. Legislative Assembly from the rural constituency of Aligarh and Mathura districts respectively.

Chaudhry Charan Singh was greatly influenced by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. He is a true Gandhian keen to implement the policies and programmes of the Mahatma. Maharishi Daya Nand and Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel also influenced Charan Singh. He was greatly impressed by these three eminent sons of India. Their writings and teachings have had a tremendous impact on his personality. Along with his legal practice the Chaudhry evinced a keen interest in social welfare activities. At the call of Mahatma Gandhi he joined the civil disobedience movement and participated in the salt satyagrah. The then Government arrested him and jailed him.

Chaudhry Charan Singh soon realised that Ghaziabad was too small a place for his ever widening activities. He wanted to shift to Meerut in 1929. He was elected Vice-President of the Meerut District Board in 1931 and continued to hold this post till 1935. The District Boards then had a non-official as Vice-President. The Deputy Commissioner of the district used to be the ex-officio President.

Chaudhry Charan Singh enrolled himself as a member of the Indian National

Congress in 1929 and held many important posts in the party organisation for several years. Between 1940-46 he was Secretary, President and Treasurer of the District Congress Committee. He was elected to the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly in 1937 from the Chhaprauli-Baraut constituency of Meerut district and set an all-India record by representing it for 40 years till 1977 when he was elected to the Lok Sabha.

The Chaudhry first joined the U.P. Government led by Pandit Pant as Parliamentary Secretary in 1946 and worked in this capacity till 1951. He was appointed a Minister in 1951 and held different portfolios till 1967 when he became Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. These portfolios included those of Home, Agriculture, Local Bodies, Revenue, Law, Forests, Irrigation and Power, Transport, Animal Husbandry, Justice & Information.

Chaudhry Charan Singh has the unique distinction of being elected twice as Chief Minister of U.P. In 1967 he led the United Front Government after Congress again to the ground and in 1969 when he headed the BKD-Congress coalition Government supported by Mrs. Gandhi's Congress.

Chaudhry Charan Singh is an eminent agriculture economist. Agricultural has been his main interest in life and he has held charge of this portfolio for over ten years.

The Chaudhry is wellknown for his integrity and crusade against corruption. An effective election campaigner, he can keep audiences spell-bound.

He is very fond of writing. He has written a number of books and articles on agriculture, land reforms and Gandhian

economy. Some of his works are "Abolition of Zamindari Co-operative Farming X-rayed", "India's Poverty And Its Solution" and "Indian Economy" A Gandhian Blueprint:

He has five daughters and a son. The eldest among his children is Satya who is married to an educationist, Prof. Guru Dutt Solanki, at present an MLA in the U.P. He was elected from Agra. The second daughter, Ved, is married to Dr. J.P. Singh, an eminent surgeon in Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, New Delhi. The third, Gyan, is a medical graduate. She resigned from a Government job recently to join her husband in Geneva. He is an I.P.S. Officer. The fourth daughter, Saroj, is married to Mr. S.P. Verma, an officer in the Sugarcane Department of U.P. Theirs is an inter-caste marriage.

His only son, Ajit Singh, is an engineering graduate and is employed in the United States of America. He is married to Radhika. Ajit Singh has three children. The youngest of the Chaudhry children is Sharda who is married to Mr. Vasudeo Singh, an engineer in the United States. Chaudhry Charan Singh and Gayatri Devi are very fond of their grandchildren, nephews and nieces. Both love them, enjoy their company and whenever possible take them out for picnics and other places of agricultural interest. The couple make it a point to spend the weekend in the country side away from the city. Both are very fond of playing cards as a past-time.

The 1977 elections brought the Chaudhry for the first time on to the national scene. He was appointed Home Minister and given No. 2 position in Morarji Desai's Government formed in March 1977.

The Chaudhry is a controversial personality. He was responsible for ordering the arrest of the former Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and launching prosecutions proceedings against her for the various offences committed by her during the emergency. He appointed several commissions to hold enquiries into the misdeeds of Mrs. Gandhi and her associates including Mr. Bansi Lal, Mr. V.C. Shukla and others.

Chaudhry Charan Singh resigned from Home Ministership in protest against the removal of Mr. Raj Narain from the Desai Government which he described as a pack of impotent persons.

Without Chaudhry Charan Singh, the Desai Government and the Janata Party found it difficult to function. They were a divided house. Chaudhry Charan Singh became a hero in the eyes of the masses who were not happy with the performance of the Janata Government. Meanwhile a Kisan rally was organised to celebrate the birthday of Chaudhry Charan Singh on December 23, 1978. It demonstrated the great following he has. The press hailed it as the biggest show of Kisan power which stood behind Charan Singh.

Chaudhry Charan Singh was again inducted into the Desai Government. He was appointed senior Deputy Prime Minister with Finance as his portfolio.

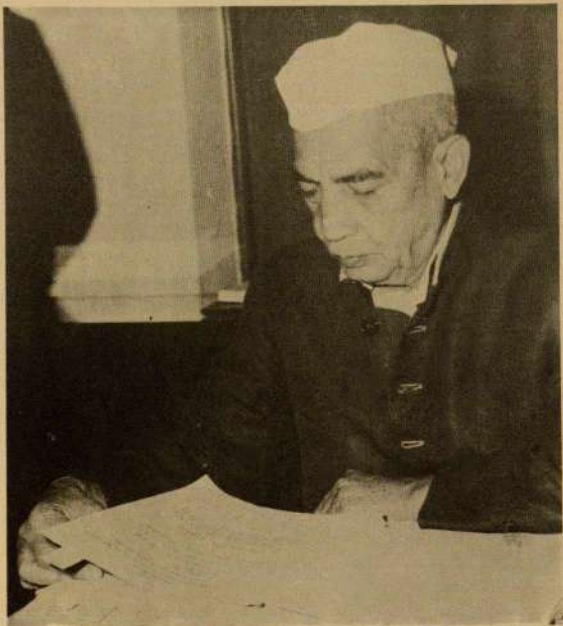
FROM NOORPUR TO NEW DELHI

CHAUDHRY CHARAN SINGH has covered a long way during his 50 years of political career to reach Delhi which was his ultimate destination. Born in Chaudhry Mir Singh's humble peasant home in village Noorpur on December 2, 1902, the Chaudhry after getting degrees the of M.A. (History) and Law began his independent legal practice in Ghaziabad in 1928, and shifted to Meerut in 1939.

In 1930, he was sent to jail for six months for contravention of salt laws. In August 1940, he was prosecuted on a false charge but was acquitted by the court. Three months later in November 1940, he was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in the individual satyagrah movement. In August 1942, he was arrested under the DIR and was released in November 1943. Most recently he was arrested under MISA on June 22, and put in Tihar Jail for more than

a year by Mrs Gandhi during the emergency.

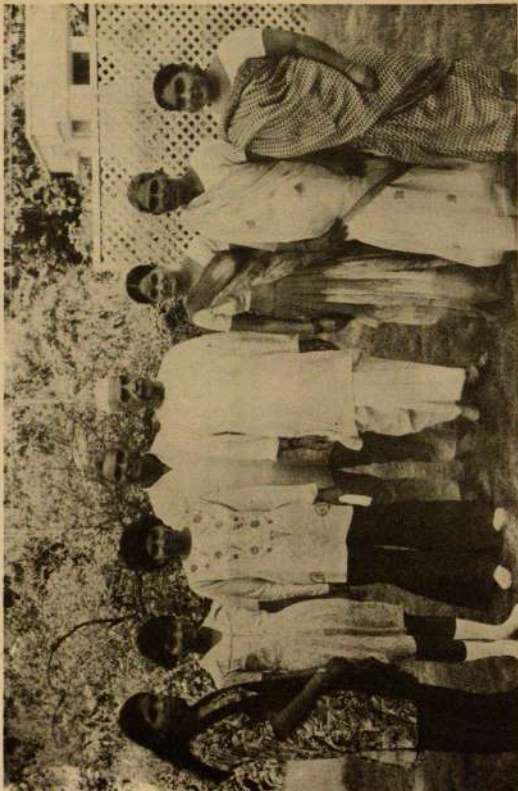
Chaudhry Charan Singh was a member of the Ghaziabad Town Congress Committee from 1929 to 1939 and held some office or the other for several years. He served either as President or General Secretary of the Meerut District Congress Committee continuously from 1939 to 1948. He had been a member of the AICC since 1946 and also a member of the State Parliamentary Board since 1951 except for a break of two years. When disgusted with infighting, he did not even seek membership the of PCC. Chaudhry Charan Singh severed all connections with group politics in 1965. So in 1966, his name did not find, a place in the State Parliamentary Board of the Congress whose members instead of being elected, were nominated by the Congress President on a group basis. He was also



Deputy Prime Minister of India Chaudhry Charan Singh is seen giving last minute touches to his budget proposals before presenting the annual budget for the year 1979-80 in the Lok Sabha on February 28, 1979.



The then Deputy Prime Minister Chaudhry Charan Singh is seen here with the President Mr. Reddy the Prime Minister Mr. Desai and other cabinet colleagues immediately after being sworn in as Deputy Prime Minister.



Prime Minister Chaudhry Charan Singh with the Author Mr. R. K. Hooda and his family at P. M.'s House on August 15, 1979.



The Prime Minister Chaudhry Charan Singh with Mrs. Gayatri Devi and the Foreign affairs Minister Mr. S.N. Mishra. His daughter Mrs. Saroj is also seen in the picture.

the General Secretary of the Congress Legislature Party in the State Legislature from 1948 to 1956.

The Chaudhry shifted from Meerut to Lucknow on his first appointment as the Parliamentary Secretary in the Pant Ministry in April 1946 and remained a member of the U.P. Cabinet, from June 1951 (except for two breaks in 1959-60 and 1963 lasting 21 months or so).

In the year 1939 Chaudhry Charan Singh introduced an Agriculture Produce Marketing Bill in the Assembly as a private Member. He wrote an article entitled "Agriculture Marketing" which appeared in the issue of the Hindustan Times of Delhi dated March 31, 1932. The measure which was intended to safeguard the interests of the producer against the greed of the trader was adopted by almost all the States. The Punjab was the first to do so. Credit for this goes to the late Sir Chhotu Ram, the then Revenue Minister of the State. In U.P. it was brought on the Statute Book in 1964 at the instance of Chaudhry Charan Singh. The measure which benefited the farmers was stoutly opposed by the trader class and urban elite on the plea that the farmers having become rich and educated could hold their own against the traders and that it was a measure of control and as controls were not liked by the people the measure was unnecessary.

In June 1939 Chaudhry Charan Singh wrote a pamphlet entitled "Prevention of Division of Holdings Below a Certain Minimum" and prepared a Bill entitled "Land Utilisation Bill" which sought to transfer the proprietary interest in agricultural holdings in U.P. to such of the tenants, or actual tillers, who chose to deposit ten times the annual rent in the Government treasury to the account of the

landlord. This was to the seeds of the land reforms that followed.

It was in April 1939 that Chaudhry Charan Singh brought a resolution before the executive of the Congress Legislature Party saying that in the interest of good government it was essential that a minimum of 50 per cent public employment be reserved for the sons and dependents of the agriculturists who form the mass of our people. But it was not considered. In March 1947 the Chaudhry again wrote a long article explaining his views and got it distributed among the members of the Congress Party as also other persons interested in public life. However despite his best efforts Chaudhry Charan Singh failed in his endeavour as the hold of non-agriculturists on public life and the Congress party was complete and the atmosphere was hostile. According to a survey made in 1961, out of a total of 1347 members of the ICS and the IAS in the country, only 155, or 11.5 per cent, came from the agricultural class.

The Chaudhry took a leading part in the formulation and finalisation of the Debt Redemption Bill of 1939 which brought great relief to the indebted peasantry. The Chaudhry and friends of his way of thinking found to their great disillusionment that leading lights of the Congress Socialist Party who professed such great solicitude for the peasants and workers from the public platform took up a strong pro-creditor stand.

In the matter of land reforms Chaudhry Charan Singh gave a lead to the country and saw to it that in his State of U.P. the Zamindari or landlord-tenant system was eradicated root and branch. The Chaudhry is the originator of every single idea embodied in the land reform legislation.

He was the spirit behind the Zamindari Abolition Act of U.P. and he so ably drafted it that not even a single provision was invalidated by the judiciary as it happened to similar legislation in other states.

Abolition of Zamindari or landlord-tenant relations and introduction of a uniform tenure throughout the State paved the way for consolidation of land holdings. Hetherefore got the necessary legislation enacted and the required staff trained without any loss of time.

He repealed the Agricultural Income Tax Act enacted in 1948 with a view largely to tax the incomes of receivers or big landlords. After the abolition of Zamindari in 1952, the Act became superfluous, so far as landlords were concerned and turned out to be a source of corruption and harassment to those who actually cultivated their lands. The Chaudhry replaced it by the Large Land-holding Tax Act which ensured that a dishonest farmer could not conceal his income as calculated under the Act.

After Chaudhry Charan Singh resigned in 1959, the Imposition of the Ceiling Act replaced the Large Land-holding Act. The new Act was framed in such a way that the area of land which could be available under it for distribution to the landless was considerably reduced.

Chaudhry Charan Singh is against strikes and wants workers in the fields and factories to work hard with devotion to duty. He cannot tolerate indiscipline and the agitational approach of Government employees. He deals with such situations with an iron hand. How Chaudhry Charan Singh dealt with the Patwaris' strike in U.P. proves that he is a man of firm decision and quick action. The Zamindari and Land

Reforms Act had just been enforced and the consequential processes were under way when the Patwaris, who numbered about 28000 and constituted a vital link in the revenue administration, began agitating for increased salaries and other facilities. Without waiting for a month or so as Chaudhry Charan Singh had advised them, they resigned *en masse* in January 1953, believing that this would bring the revenue administration to a standstill and, as a consequence, bend the Government to its knees. Chaudhry Charan Singh, however, did not kneel down before them. He created an institution of Lokpals who enjoyed fewer and lesser powers than the Patwaris. He met with tough opposition from the higher echelons of the Congress Party but he did not flinch. He told his colleagues and leaders that if the Government did not waiver, Government servants would not think of staging a strike or issuing threats to it for the next ten years. His prophecy proved true for 13 years, that is till 1966, when non-gazetted employees of the State struck work in the days of Mrs. Sucheta Kriplani and at one time succeeded in paralysing the administration for a period of nine weeks at a stretch. For political reasons, Chaudhry Charan Singh's advice in this matter was not accepted.

Chaudhry Charan Singh for the first time hit the headlines in the national Press when at the historic Nagpur Congress session he lashed out against Prime Minister Nehru and stoutly opposed co-operative farming. The Chaudhry made out a logical case against Nehru's proposal of introducing co-operative farming in the country. He made a forceful speech at the AICC session which thwarted the attempt of Nehru and Congressmen of his way of thinking introduce co-operative farming. Even today the country is far from the goal of co-operative farming.

He pointed out to the Congress delegates attending the session that pooling of land and labour was not necessary for increased production, and that both these schemes were impracticable and militated against our democratic way of life. The former would lead to decrease in production and the latter to wastage of public funds and corruption. This belief of the Chaudhry and its bold and clear expression in the presence of Nehru was one of the reasons behind his resignation from the U.P. Cabinet in 1959. But he would not hesitate to take a stand which he considered for the good of the country and its people.

Apart from fulfilling the demands of social justice, the land reforms in U.P. were going to serve as a bulwark for democracy. This argument, however, had no appeal for the opponents of Chaudhry Charan Singh's policies. As time has proved, however, it is the mainly land reforms which despite the deteriorating political and administrative conditions in the State after the departure of Pandit Pant for Delhi, prevented communism from gaining a foothold in the State as it has in several other States in India.

Chaudhry Charan Singh's popularity, both amongst the masses and the intelligentsia, is unassailable. It is proved by the thumping majority by which he was elected to the U.P. Assembly in February 1967. He beat his closest rival by more than 52,000 votes—the highest margin in any assembly constituency in all the four general elections held so far in the country.

Chaudhry Charan Singh received appreciation and applause from the opposition in almost every session of the Legislature for his common sense and practical policies. Not only that. As proceedings of the Legislative Assembly

will testify, there were several occasions when Chaudhry Charan Singh was in the midst of a speech, and the leader of the opposition asked for extension of time of the sitting (and got it) so that they might further profit by his knowledge and experience.

The Chaudhry is an untiring crusader against corruption in the administration. His own integrity in the widest sense of the term is beyond doubt. His private life is above reproach and an open book for the public. Nor can he be charged with abuse of power in the interest of those who are near and dear to him. As somebody wrote to an American student of U.P. politics, "Chaudhry Charan Singh is not accommodating even to his own people to the extent he should be".

Chaudhry Charan Singh has the unique distinction among politicians in India of not being under the obligation of any businessman, or industrialist. During elections he gets financial support from his constituents without even asking for it.

There can be no greater tribute to his character than the fact that during the long period in which he has enjoyed political power, nobody, at least, no disinterested person, can point an accusing finger at the Chaudhry.

Chaudhry Charan Singh is fond of reading. His absorption in his duties is obvious from the fact that he does not like touring.

4

AS THE PRESS KNEW HIM

AT the time of Chaudhry Charan Singh's resignation from the U.P. Cabinet 1959, the National Herald of Lucknow paid a tribute to him editorially in its issue of April 23. It said :

"There is a tragedy, both personal and organisational, in Mr. Charan Singh's resignation. His exit is a loss to the U.P. administration and Mr. Sampurnanand has also lost an able, earnest minded and hard working colleague with a reputation for integrity when such reputations are rare. There were several occasions when he differed strongly from Mr. Charan Singh and criticised him severely on matters of policy, but his sincerity of purpose, his knowledge of the subjects he had to deal with and his devotion to duty could not be questioned."

All these qualities are grudgingly conceded even by his political opponents,

as would appear from the book, "Factional Politics in an Indian State" by an American author, Paul R. Brass, published by Oxford University Press, Bombay.

The following are extracts from this book by Brass who wrote that their only charge against Mr. Charan Singh is that he is "proud by nature and uncompromising in his relations with others."

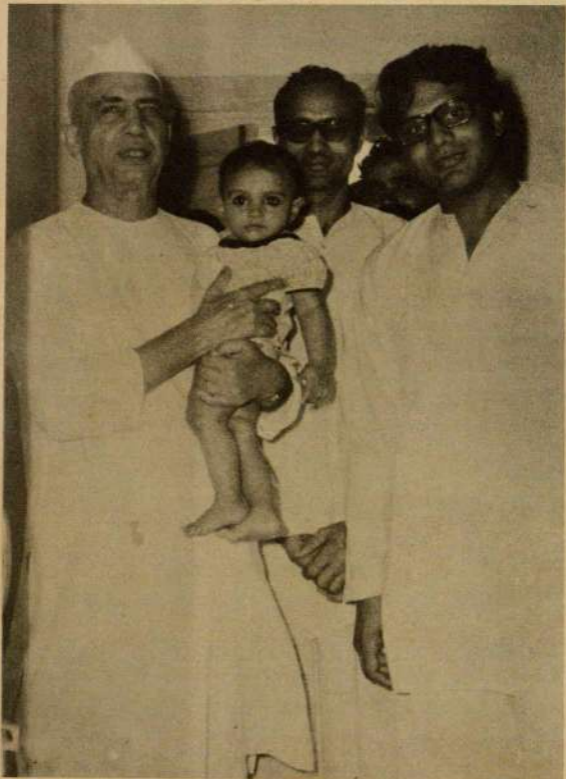
"...Chaudhry Charan Singh, currently minister for agriculture in Uttar Pradesh Government, has dominated the district congress and district politics (of Meerut) since the early forties and successfully resisted numerous challenges to his leadership during his long rule. Chaudhry Sahib, as he is reverentially called by his followers, has been an unusually successful factional leader in Uttar Pradesh politics. Inspired less by a desire for power



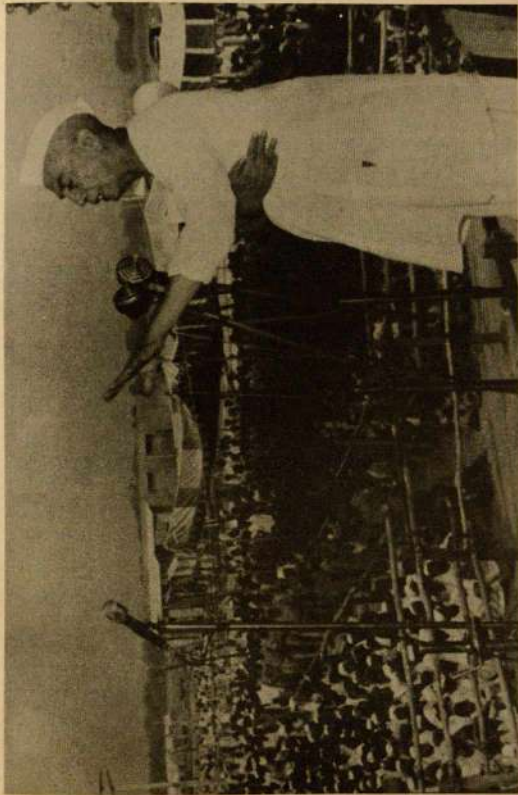
Chaudhry Charan Singh meeting Chief Minister of West Bengal Mr. Jyoti Basu in New Delhi on July 9, 1977.



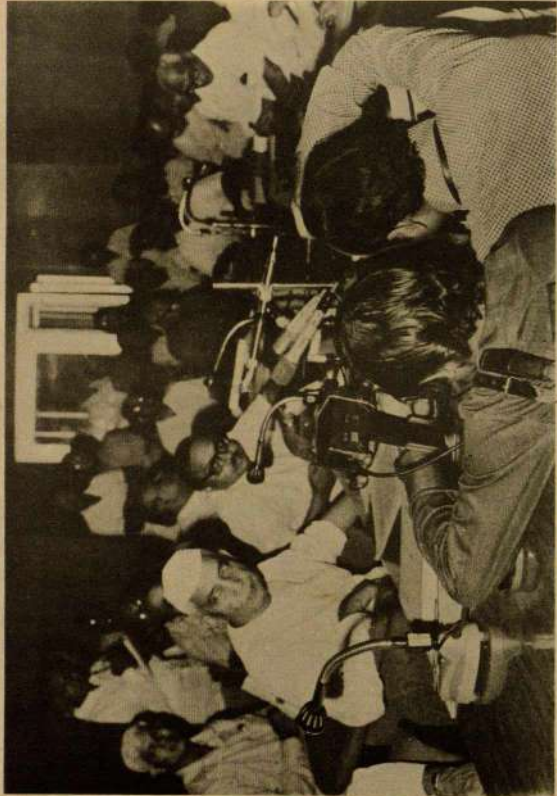
His holiness Dalai Lama called on the then Home Minister Chaudhry Charan Singh in New Delhi on July 23, 1977.



Chaudhry Charan Singh is seen with a child, at the house of Ch. Ranbir Singh Advocate in Bulandsehar.



Chaudhry Charan Singh, Deputy Prime Minister of India, addressing a public meeting at village Ramnala in U. P. where he performed opening ceremony of a sugar factory on April 14, 1979.



Chaudhry Charan Singh is seen addressing a press conference in New Delhi on October 4, 1977.

than by an invincible belief in the righteousness of his actions and policies, Charan Singh seeks neither friend nor favour and gives no quarter to those who oppose him" (p. 139).

"Charan Singh is not exactly an intellectual in politics but he is a well read man. With an incisive intelligence which he has devoted to a continuing study of agricultural problems in Uttar Pradesh, Charan Singh is the leading ideologist in Uttar Pradesh of the peasant-proprietor. As a prominent member of the U.P. Zamindari abolition committee he worked hard to ensure that the Zamindari Abolition Act would contain no loopholes, which would permit the continued dominance of the Zamindars in the rural economy of the state and to make certain that landlordism may not raise its head again (p. 139-140)."

"Charan Singh has many of the qualities of the ideal faction leader. He is known for his intellectual abilities and has a reputation for integrity. No one has ever charged him with a desire for material advantage for himself. The major criticism levelled against Charan Singh as party leader is that he is proud by nature and uncompromising in his relations with others" (p. 141).

A well-known political commentator, Mr. K. C. Khanna, Resident Editor of the Times of India, Bombay, in an article under the caption "Charan Singh the big Question" wrote in the Illustrated Weekly of India, Bombay, dated January 14-20, 1979 :

"Next to Indira Gandhi, Charan Singh is, in a way, the most important political leader in the country. Like the former he has no organisation worth the name to command. But he can attract crowds and

deliver the votes. Alone among the Janata's bigwigs, he has a mass base. While few of his economic ideas are beyond challenge, his personal integrity is unquestionable. Any Government in New Delhi that seeks to hound him out of the nation's democratic policy can probably survive. But the hope that it can acquire or maintain stability in the process must be written off as moonshine."

"Charan Singh is apt to make claims which in today's political context sound boastful, if not bizarre. But very often what he says is simply the whole truth. More than anyone else he had catalysed the Janata Party into being by pre-empting Jayaprakash Narain's idea of "merger" and not a coalition. He paved the way for Morarji Desai's elevation to the Prime Minister's post by opting out of the race in the former's favour; if there had been a free vote Jagjivan Ram would have probably romped home.

"There may be no such thing as gratitude in politics but none can ignore the hard realities on the ground except at his peril. It is clear as daylight that Mrs. Gandhi has hit the comeback trail, mainly because of vicious infighting in the Janata's top leadership and partly because two of the most inept state Governments in the country—the ones in populous UP and Bihar—are headed by Charan Singh's handpicked nominees. And yet, Charan Singh's hold on popular imagination in the nation's Hindi heartland remains unrivalled."

"True, it is still not quite certain whether Charan Singh's BLD is the biggest bulwark in the way of Mrs. Gandhi's return to power by popular demand or whether other factors, including the courts or memories of Emergency, will play an equal

or greater role in blocking her progress. But, for good or for ill (depending on one's predilection) there can be no doubt about Charan Singh's influence in his own parish. The recent Kisan rally to celebrate his birthday is enough of a testimony. No other political leader or group could have organised a "show" like that anywhere in the country, much less in New Delhi."

"Hard-headed politicians are, however, less impressed by crowds than votes and at the moment the numbers game in the Janata parliamentary party not to speak of Parliament, does not particularly favour Charan Singh. It never will. No society—feudal, socialist, capitalist or communist—has ever been ruled by peasants. Why this is so is for sociologists to discover. Perhaps the farmer, by the very nature of his calling, is too attached to his land to develop a wider view of the national needs and possibilities in the global context. The emergence of a powerful peasants' party in Australia or the elevation of a peanut farmer to the U.S. Presidency proves nothing. In any case, the percentage of population engaged in farming must dwindle and more and more manpower get diverted into industry or services as every nation marches ahead on the road to modernisation."

"This does not mean, however, that in the present stage of India's development, Charan Singh and his party can be counted out. He makes the emotive point that over the years the wealth of the rural areas has been sucked into the cities, that urban areas are favoured in the provision of education, health services, drinking water, electricity and above all job opportunities, and that a fair deal must be given to villages where India lives. His demands cannot be ignored nor grievances wished away.

"Charan Singh has been keen to dispel

the impression sought to be created by his detractors that he is a champion of the kulaks and wants the country to set its face against modern machinery, if not leap backwards into the 16th century.

"I am not so daft as to abhor heavy industry regardless", he told me recently and went on to elaborate: "The ultimate aim, of course, is to have fewer and still fewer men working on the soil so that more and more workers are released for the production of industrial goods and services that a civilised society needs. But as long as there are millions upon millions of unemployed, and underemployed persons in the country waiting for employment, for full employment, we need to have an agrarian system which, compared to all others, provides the largest employment possible per acre."

"In contrast, his hostility to big and absentee landlords is implacable. Indeed, it could be argued that he would not have been able to retain his hold on the imagination of the rural folk for more than three decades in the northern states if he had not served them with credit. As a Revenue Minister in Uttar Pradesh during the fifties he not only conceived fairly radical land reforms but braved and overcame the opposition of both socialist luminaries and his own seniors in the Congress (including the then Chief Minister, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant) to implement them."

"The thoroughness with which land reforms have been carried out in Uttar Pradesh has been acknowledged again and again by the study teams of the Planning Commission and independent observers like Professor W. A. Ladenisky. It is largely due to Charan Singh's endeavours that absentee landlordism has been virtually

eliminated from the state; middle farmers now dominate the countryside; and some three million sub-tenants as well as so-called trespassers have been secured permanent rights in the land they till."

"Mr. Charan Singh", says an admirer, "can never cook a good meal nor can he ever set the house ablaze. But he can keep the pot on the simmer and usually does." For all his vision and patriotism, he is singularly inept. He began grandly in the mid-seventies with the aim of creating a viable two-party system in the country, but when the prize was well within his grasp, he took the first available opportunity to try and destroy Mrs. Gandhi for good a bid that he eventually fouled up. He is bitterly opposed to the personality cult but most of his moves since Janata's advent to power have revolved round just two personalities—Morarji Desai and himself. He bemoans the resurgence of casteism but is still groping for a way to shed his 'Jat' image."

An eminent journalist, Ranjit Roy, assessed Chaudhry Charan Singh's ideas, ambitions, strength and weaknesses in his cover story published in Sunday, weekly magazine of Calcutta, of June 12, 1977.

Following are excerpts from article entitled "The Man Who Would Be King" which appeared just after Chaudhry Charan Singh became No. 2 in the Desai Government with Home as his portfolio.

"Those who know Mr. Charan Singh well are agreed that he is a man of determination and fixed ideas. He is a forthright, person and one great qualification of his is that he does not know how to conceal his ambition. A man of intense loves and hates, he did not shine much as a lawyer in Meerut, but he has risen very high on the political ladder.

"Twice Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh without being able to complete full terms, he is now Home Minister and the second in command in the Government of India. There is just one more step for him to climb and he will have fulfilled his life's ambition. But this happens to be the most difficult step. Will he make it?

"If it is left to him he will prove to be a great political iconoclast. He will turn everything the Congress under Mr. Nehru and Mrs. Gandhi did, upside down. He calls himself a devotee of Gandhian ideals and has authored a book titled "TOWARDS GANDHI" which is awaiting publication. He has no patience with anything that smacks of Socialism, even of the confused Nehruian or Congress kind."

"Mr. Charan Singh says the people must take the blame for trying to make 'peace with the ideologues' whom Nehru had drafted for the purpose of planned development of the country. 'Like democracy and socialism Gandhi and Nehru are unmixable' he says."

"Mr. Charan Singh has emerged as the second most powerful man in the country—second only to the Prime Minister. A man who is either loved or hated, he is the object of both intense awe and irrational dislike. There are many, even within Janata Party, who believe that Charan Singh will even destroy the Janata Party if in turn he can become Prime Minister—the King. But he denies this vehemently. Charan Singh is an ambitious man, as the trouble which arose within the Janata Party during selection of nominees for the Assembly elections proved. But he has much to commend him. He is the rare politician in the country against whom there is no charge of corruption. His scrupulous honesty has won him the admiration and love of lakhs of people in the North".

"In 1967 when he deserted the Congress and brought about the downfall of Mr. C.B. Gupta's Congress Government, Mr. Singh announced that he had been associated with Congress for 45 years. Being 64 at that time, he must have been taking part in Congress politics since he was 19. He underwent imprisonment in 1942. The most important office he ever held in the Congress was that of General Secretary of the U.P.C.C. from 1946-56."

"His capacity to bring under one roof parties which apparently do not agree must be uncommon. He brought along with him a sufficient number of Congress MLAs (sixteen) to give him, in association with Jan Sangh, the SSP, the PSP, the CPI, the Swatantra and the Republican Party, besides some independents, a majority to form a Government. No other leader has perhaps ever been able to bring so many disparate elements together. The coalition came to be known as SVD (Samyukta Vidhayak Dal)".

"Meanwhile at a conference at Indore (November 1967) a new party called the Bharatiya Karanti Dal (BKD) was formed. Mr. Singh was one of the prime movers of it and had with him a number of leaders from several states who had also left the Congress, Mr. Ajoy Mukherjee and Mr. Hamayun Kabir of West Bengal, Mr. Mahamaya Pershad Singh of Bihar, Mr. Kumbha Ram Arya of Rajasthan and Mr. Harekrishna Mahtab of Orissa were among them. Mr. Singh made another bid for power in the 1974 election in UP, but the Congress managed to get a majority although its votes went down to 32 per cent. However Mr. Singh formed a minority Government after the split in the Congress. He formed a minority BKD Government in 1969 with Mrs. Gandhi's Congress support".

Charan Singh as Prime Minister with Indira's Help

Credit goes to Sasthi Brata—a well-known Indian journalist based in London—for predicting that the Chaudhry will be Prime Minister with Mrs. Gandhi's help in an article published in "Onlooker", a magazine published from Bombay in its issue dated January 16-31, 1979. Some extracts from his articles are given below :

"Chaudhry Charan Singh is a Jat and a man of intense pride and moral consciousness. His heart is weak and at 77, thoughts of human morality must occasionally, if not constantly, flit through his mind. Can these factors be entirely irrelevant to the decisions he makes and the way he looks at the future...."

"Chaudhry Sahib is a man of the people. He practised as a civil advocate, but did not go to Harrow and Cambridge. He is learned in his own way, but resents condescension especially when it comes from upstarts who see the world from posh drawing-rooms and through the tinted glasses of Fabian Utopia. He may know the country better than the former inmates of Anand Bhawan, but basically he is a simple man. He talks of 'honour' as a tangible thing, rather than as a concept in the semantic puzzle of an Oxford tutorial.

"But the man is old and also very ill. Being a politician he is not devoid of a fierce personal ambition. 'If I could be King-maker, why can I now not be a King?' must be a thought which passes through his mind, though perhaps it is phrased in somewhat more earthy language....

"When I met him in his house Charan Singh was encased in a shawl even though

the temperature outside was a reasonable 80 degrees F. There were Rabi Ray and Raj Narain waiting on the lawn outside, while inside the room there was an atmosphere of hospital, with that thing which doctors use to measure blood pressure, along with a host of phials and medicine bottles in a corner...

"That shaved round head with an even growth of short grey hair, along with a distinctly Roman nose and those deep set eyes made him look more ascetic than perhaps he is.

"Chaudhry Charan Singh is the only senior politician who did not either extend his hand for a shake nor fold his palms together into a 'Namaskar'. Chaudhry Sahib motioned me with his eyes to sit in the chair next to him and cleared his throat several times before voicing a single word.

"We got on well right from the start. He was forthcoming and totally without self-consciousness, even displaying a touching naivete when he said, 'I expected her to behave honourably, with reference to the arrest he had authorised in October, 1977.

"He had no great regard for his former colleagues in the Cabinet, and there were several sharply disparaging remarks he made about senior political figures, including the Prime Minister, which led me to doubt his sagacity. But that he was an honest and uncomplicated man was never in doubt.

"I left his room a little puzzled and quite a bit impressed. Though the overwhelming feeling was that of an impending and inevitable finale.

"Whatever the outcome, I am convinced that the pot pourri connection that is presently called the Janata Party will

soon boil over. There may be enough substance left in the container to still make a meal. But if the fires of communalism, casteism and personal rivalries rage on with the present ferocity, there will be nothing at the bottom of the vessel but charred residue. Or to change the metaphor, Humpty Dumpty will never be put together again. I shall sketch a possible scenario for the future, which I sincerely hope will not be enacted.

"Chaudhry Charan Singh's patience is exhausted beyond endurance; his sense of being 'the aggrieved party' is inflamed by his followers who do not cease reminding him that his 'honour' has been impugned. The prospect of joining forces with Indira Gandhi is not as unpleasant as it once was, because the Prime Minister is seen to be the biggest stumbling block for 'the prosperity of the nation.'

"A new party is formed, to which a substantial section of the former BLD parliamentarians pledge their loyalties. Janata, though officially still commanding majority votes in the Lok Sabha heads for a total crack-up (with the RSS pulling one way and socialists another), while Morarji Desai resolutely refuses to budge, and Jagjivan Ram characteristically and patiently waits to the last minute to see which horse is the better bet.

"Meanwhile what is left of the Congress (O) is further dismembered by the 'unity' faction going over to Mrs. Gandhi's party. At this time the trump card finally falls into Charan Singh's lap. He is offered the Prime Ministership unconditionally by Mrs. Gandhi, her calculation being that human life is of finite duration, especially so in the case of an ill old man.

"Chaudhry Sahib is confronted with a choice. Either to sit on the hot seat, even for a few months or may be a year, only to usher in the certainty of Gandhite oligarchy later. Or to do his patriotic duty, swallow his pride, be magnanimous, and put up with what his principal adjutant has called 'a bunch of impotants'.

"The Kisan leader decides that 'honour' must win, that he has an obligation both to himself and to his loyal supporters. He accepts the crown and lives happily ever after, till the natural span of life runs out. There is no one to thwart the lady anymore. Indira Gandhi rules again.

"I hope it won't happen. But it is a reckless man who will bet this fortune on the contrary."

This Fortnight, a New Delhi magazine in its issue of December 7-21, 1979, carries an article under the heading "CHARAN SINGH VS INDIRA" some extracts from which are given below :

"Although Mrs Gandhi excels at exploiting political issues Mr. Charan Singh's appeal lies in his crusade against corruption, and in his being a spokesman of the farmers. Both of them draw big crowds wherever he went in Fatehpur and this in spite of the inclement weather on November 29 and 30, the last two days of campaigning. Mr. Charan Singh's meeting, at Dhara, 75 kilometers from Fatehpur city, began under an overcast sky. No sooner had he started speaking than it began to drizzle. The 5000 strong rally listened in patience after Mr. Charan Singh's remark 'Brothers we are farmers used to working in the rains.' He spoke for nearly an hour, explaining why the farmers' life had not changed despite 30 years of freedom. He accused Congress leaders of not heeding the

advice of Mahatma Gandhi who had advised Congressmen to think of the villages as the real India lived there, to pay attention to agriculture, to village industries. But Congress leaders had laid emphasis on big factories which only helped Tatas and Birlas. He also had a dig at the elected representatives. 'These representatives forget you when they go to Lucknow and Delhi.

As all eyes turn to the return of Indira Gandhi into the centre stage of Indian politics, an ageing warrior sits alone with his thoughts in the lawns of his 12, Tughlak Road residence in New Delhi. He is the man, more than Mrs. Indira Gandhi who will decide the shape of the things to come in the immediate future.

Charan Singh, the founding father of the Janata Party is a sad man today as he approaches the end of his 77th year. Pain and anguish are etched deep into his steel grey eyes as he talks softly and haltingly to his gradually diminishing stream of visitors. And today, almost 20 months after his brain child—the Janata Party—came to power, his cup of sorrow seems to have brimmed over. "It is I who am more responsible for the present state of things than any one else. Do you follow ? Whom will I complain to, it is my own doing or undoing, call it anything," he said.

Prophet Armed : A little over two years ago, Charan Singh was released from Delhi's Tihar Jail. For almost a decade, he had been the lone voice in the wilderness, whistling into a coming storm, warning his countrymen of a coming holocaust. As he stepped out of prison, his nightmare of a decade seemed a reality. A seemingly invincible "dictatorship" held the country in its iron grip.

But then things began to change—with a rapidness that far exceeded even Charan

Singh's expectations. The prophet of a united opposition party to fell the almighty Congress, began to get armed. The man who created the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal, the Bhartiya Lok Dal and the Bhartiya Kranti Dal, became the founding father of the Janata Party. As the Janata Party assumed office in the wake of the historic March 77 general elections, Charan Singh, the prophet was armed.

Then Charan Singh was "the ultimate strongman, of impeccable integrity and total incorruptibility". No man, it was said, had filled the office of the Home Minister so colossal like since the days of Sardar Patel. As the ruling deity of the Janata Party, he propounded his Tolstoyan-Gandhian, yearning for the return to pastoral life—with its ideal of the simple village life, with its feudal relationships and its small farmers living happily with minimum of state interference. He struggled to refocus India's planning and priorities back to where they belong—in the..... villages where 80 per cent of the Indians live. Above all he promised a fight unto death against corruption.

Prophet Unarmed : But then things began to go wrong. "I was guided and driven by certain ideas, but as it happens my colleagues did not share those ideas s.....if I received any support in the Cabinet for my ideas, it was from my intimate colleague, Raj Narain," he said. Then began a calculated round of what his followers call "the great bear baiting". Atrocities on Harijans were suddenly found to be taking place all over the country; the law and order situation seemed about to fall apart and the infighting within the Janata Party continued unabated and with a certain gathering momentum. And then, with a swiftness that surpassed even the arming of the prophet, he was unarmed,

Charan Singh and his colleague Raj Narain were removed from the union cabinet.

Increasing differences with Prime Minister Morarji Desai and Janata Party President Chandra Shekhar had come to a point of no return. "We had won the elections in the name of the village, the farmer the unemployed young people and in the name of Gandhi. We had won on the symbol of the kisan—the poor kisan. But we have not been able to achieve any of these aims and I am afraid we are not likely to achieve them in the future also..." said Charan Singh. The disillusionment with the Janata Party among Charan Singh's followers also ran parallel to the wilder disenchantment within the public.

Prophet outcast : Now with the return of Indira Gandhi and the lack of any signs of improvement in the Janata Party's functioning, more and more people within Parliament and outside are looking to see what the ageing leader does. With all possible permutations and combinations of a compromise seemingly exhausted, there is little doubt left to most observers that Charan Singh is now preparing himself for yet another battle. And, of course, his focus is the kisans. "Everybody has been exploiting them (farmers). Gandhiji was absolutely right when he said that the cities are the exploiters of the villagers. That is why I think that an organisation of the kisans is necessary," he said.

He also knows that time, the great arbiter, is running out on him. Hence he places his faith, not on his lieutenants—leaders whom he resurrected from their graves and placed in positions of power—but on 'his people', the kisans. He himself feels that his legacy will remain the reawakening in the rural India. "If that is achieved, Ajay, then I will think my

life will be a full life, a successful life," he said.

An Interview with Charan Singh

Q : Although it is widely believed that you are quite unhappy with the way things are going in the Janata Party and in the country, you have chosen to keep silent for all these months. Why ?

A : I am unhappy that is why I am keeping quiet (*laughs*). It is a vicious circle.

Q : Your followers seem to be getting impatient, waiting for you to speak out...

A : May be some people might be wanting to know my views, but I would like to wait for some time more.

Q : For how long ?

A : Six weeks at the outside. May be I will have to break my silence earlier, but six weeks at the outside.

Q : You have often said that while you will work for the Party, you are not willing to join the Cabinet. This can be taken as an expression of no confidence in the Government.

A : You have got your own views. *'Pahale-ki kaha diya hai ki I am not happy Usme sabhi cheez aa jatti hain (Raj Narain adds: Man Nahin Karta ha ki ham kam Janata ke saath karein kyonki hamko nahin lagta ki kuchh hone wala hai. Kuchh ho jai agar to wo aur baat hai)*. My being reinducted into the Cabinet, along with Raj Narainji of course, I don't think is going to make any difference in the present state of affairs. Even if I join, despite this feeling of mine, I don't think I will be able to achieve anything at all.

In fact when I gave up the Congress and formed the BKD—although the immediate

cause for my break with the Congress was the breach of faith on the part of Congress leadership—some differences on grounds of principles had also cropped up. So, my parting of ways with the Congress had something to do with principles and ideology—not as in the case of others who left merely on personal grounds. I had a certain vision that I had formed about my country, and its future. It is that vision, that ideology, that ambition of making this country great once again, to restore to it its old glory, that had motivated me and has moved me throughout these 10-12 years. And led me to five general elections, almost single handedly, almost like a mad man, a man who is just infatuated with an ideal.

So I thought the replacement of Congress by the SVD government will mean a radical change—not merely a change, but a very radical change—the entire outlook of the Administration, the Government, the Parliament and the political leaders will be changed. And that has not come about, now, I am afraid, it is not likely to come about. It is this that really pains me and that is the point.

Q : Many people expected the same sort of thing to take place from the Janata Party's formation and its coming into Government. But that has also not happened. No radical change no basic change...

A : True, that is my problem also. I was guided and driven by certain ideas but as it happens my colleagues did not share those ideas. But a majority of Parliamentarians do share it. They all come from the village. We had won these elections in the name of the village, the farmer, the unemployed young people and in the name of Gandhi. We had won on the symbol of the BKD, in the name of the

Haldhar, in the name of the kisan—the poor kisan. It was against corruption, against unemployment, against the widening disparities in our economy and against the concentration of property. But above all, it was against corruption.

We have not been able to achieve any of these aims and I am afraid we are not likely to achieve any of these aims in the future also. If the Party and the Government continue to function as they have been doing for the last 20 months, there is little hope.....

Q : About corruption.....

A : As you know, I am handicapped by another thought. It is I who is more responsible for the present state of things than any one else. Do you follow? As far as the Prime Minister is concerned, I have

no moral right to complain. As far as the President of the Party is concerned I have no right to complain. It was Raj Narainji and I who put forward his name. The same is the case with the PM. So we have no moral right to complain. That is also one of the reasons why I am keeping quiet. Whom will I complain to, it is my own doing or undoing, call it anything.

Q : Many of your supporters feel that it is you more than any of these people who will be asked to explain by the people, by the masses....

A : Before that occasion arises, I will be one with the people again, Raj Narainji is already going amongst them. He speaks on behalf of himself, on behalf of all my colleagues, all those who think alike with me and on behalf of me also. So it is not that I am divorced from the Janata.

CHARAN SINGH'S ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL THOUGHTS

THERE are two main causes of our failure on the economic front: misallocation of financial outlays between industry and agriculture and introduction, rather remultiplication, of the big machine. So, there are two main remedies: revision of the allocation in favour of agriculture and discarding of the big machine to the extent possible. The former involved top emphasis on rural development and the latter, a decision to switch over to self-reliance to the exclusion of foreign capital and foreign technology—an economy that is directed by our factor endowment.

Neglect of agriculture is, so to say, the "original sin" of the planners of India's destiny. Neglect of agriculture meant lack of agriculture surplus, that is, lack of food and raw materials. For want of adequate food production we have had to spend an amount of Rs. 6,000 crores or more on food

imports till date and, for want of both food and raw materials, our industry and other non-agricultural employment have not developed. In 1951, 72 per cent of our workers were employed in agriculture, 10 per cent in industry, and 18 per cent in the rest of the economy; exactly the same proportion obtains today. So far as national income per capita is concerned, our country is one of the very poorest. What is still more alarming, our rate of economic growth is almost the lowest. In the international sphere, we enjoy the reputation of a beggar.

Second, we committed the mistake of setting of our sights too high and, on attainment of political power, immediately fell for heavy industry. Gandhi wanted to build the country from the bottom upwards on the strength of its own resources with the village or agriculture and handicrafts as

the base and the town or a few large-scale industries, that we must inevitably have, as the apex. We forgot that development of India's economy or a rise in the living standard of its vast millions will have to take place within the framework of its own factor endowment (in other words, within the limitations set by its lowland or natural resources-man ratio) and of democratic freedoms which prevent exploitation of its own working force beyond a point. The present situation can therefore be remedied by a shift of resources from the metropolitan, industrialized, capital-intensive and centralised production based on the purchasing power of upper-middle classes to agriculture, employment-oriented and decentralised production which, in Gandhi's telling words, is "not only for the masses but also by the masses".

In most countries, the development of both agriculture and labour-intensive industries, which Mahatma Gandhi had advocated, came first and this policy has paid them handsome dividends. Japan provides the most prominent examples; even mainland China has been following it since 1962 (with the important difference that farming is collectivised). This is the only way that a large and labour-surplus country, particularly India, can solve the employment-poverty problem for the mass of the people, while simultaneously building the heavy industry it ought to have.

Heavy industry and specially heavy-machine-making industry has never been the 'root of the base' of economic growth. The basis of economic growth in the early phase of industrialization was agriculture, trade and handicrafts. In all the great industrial powers except the USSR and Japan, heavy industry grew on the basis of consumer goods industries responding to their demand and adjusting itself to their needs. This

refers not only to the United States, Great Britain and Germany but also to France, Italy, Canada and so on. The opposite course of development in Russia and Japan was due to exceptional historical conditions. In Russia after Peter the Great, Japan after the Meiji Restoration industrialization was promoted and largely controlled by the Government and subordinated to its political aims. In both countries heavy industry was pushed ahead as the basis of military power rather than the foundation of further industrialization. The Soviets in Russia and the military party in Japan on the eve of World War II took over and carried forward this policy with increased ruthlessness.

Looked at more critically, it is agriculture, and agriculture alone which is the "root and base" of economic progress. A country will go on developing only to the extent supply of food and raw materials available from land allows it. Unless the farmers produce more than their needs, they will have nothing to sell and, therefore, no wherewithal to buy. This means that in the absence of increased agricultural production, there will be even no trade and no handicrafts.

As already pointed out, there can be no improvement in the living standards of people, no economic development of a country, unless surpluses of food and raw materials are available within the country itself (or, their supply in exchange of manufacturers is assured from outside). Not only that, the speed and scope or pattern of its industrialization depends on the rate and amount of the surpluses a country is able to realise. Circumstances of a country like India where the land-man ratio is low, where labour is relatively abundant and capital scarce, that is men are cheaper than machines, call for an economy in which hand-operated industries or handicrafts and

cottage industries will predominate. When agricultural productivity goes up, resulting in a further increase of farm incomes and, consequently, a higher demand for manufactured goods, a cumulative process is set in motion, that is more and more industries are set up and the industrialization that has already been offered itself becomes a cause rather than merely remain a consequence of increase in incomes.

There being a great diversity of human wants, various industries, particularly those which are mutually complementary, that is, which provide a market for, and thus support each other—and most industries fall under this definition—begin to spring up one after another, and per capita incomes go on increasing further and further.

Gradually, a point is reached where (owing to growth of various kinds of industries and services) labour becomes relatively scarce and capital abundant, that is, when men cease to be cheaper but become dearer than machines. It is at this stage, a stage in which India will take very long to arrive, that an economy takes on a character or develop into one where machine-operated takes on mechanized industries will predominate. The progression from handicrafts to mechanized industries from labour-intensive techniques to capital-intensive techniques is governed by the rate at which farm surpluses are available or capital becomes available relatively to labour that is released from, or no longer required in, agriculture. As cottage and small-scale industries grow on the basis of agricultural surpluses, mainly in the form of good and raw materials, so will grow mechanized industries on the basis of cottage and small-scale industries, responding to their demand and adjusting themselves to their needs. So then in our circumstances of a dense agrarian economy

heavy and large-scale mechanized industries should come in course of time as the apex of an economic structure with agriculture and handicrafts or village industries as its base.

In India, progress has to be measured not by the quantity of steel or number of automobiles and television sets that we are able to manufacture but by the quantity and quality of basic necessities of life like food, cloth, houses, health, education etc. that become available to "the last man", as Gandhi used to say. Assigning priority to heavy industry in India and other similarly situated countries means retardation of agricultural development, food shortages, and dependence on imported food.

There are several countries in the developing world also, with no better natural resources than India, where jobs are plentiful and the poor are creating wealth, where fewer babies are dying and everyone is becoming literate. Among these countries, democratic in political complexion, are Taiwan, Israel, Puerto Rico and Egypt. The question arises: "Why is it, then, that India is still floundering in poverty, and misery and has not been able to forge ahead?" Obviously our policies have been faulty and need to be revised. This involves shedding of certain fallacies that have been fostered for too long.

To mention only one or two of the fallacies: many people believe that large farms produce and employ more people than small farms. In fact, small farms produce more and employ more per acre than large mechanized farms—small and cottage industries produce more and employ more per unit of capital investment than big urban factories equipped with the latest machines. It is land in the field of agriculture and capital in the field of

industry that are the limiting factors in India and, as every student of economics knows, should therefore be utilised to the maximum. What is more, there is no other democratic method of ensuring economic growth with social justice.

Economic Philosophy : Our economists and planners perhaps do not take into account Indian conditions but are influenced by the theories of Karl Marx who concluded without due examination of facts that the laws regarding industrial development at which he had arrived applied to agriculture also.

There is need for India to develop an alternative to the two extreme forms—a capitalistic democracy as it originally developed in the western countries and democratic centralism as practised in communist countries

Private Sector : The private sector representing capitalism calls for a highly progressive system of taxation and direct transfer of tax receipts to the needy and for public spending on projects that benefit the poor more than the rich.

Public Sector : So far as the public sector representing Marxian socialism (or shall we say communism) is concerned, its performance, at least in our country, has been disappointing. While there is no question of taxation in this sector, it offers little or no surplus that may be directly or indirectly transferred to the poor and the underemployed.

Rural Economy : India's purpose will be served best by an economy which consists of small independent peasant-farms interlinked by service cooperatives in the field of agriculture and subject to certain exceptions mainly of cottage and small-scale

enterprises, again served by cooperatives, where necessary, in the field of manufacturing industry. Such an economy will produce more goods, provide more employment, curb income disparities and promote a democratic way of life.

Urban-Rural Relationship : The 'colonial' relationship which has developed between towns and villages will disappear only when consumer goods, ranging from soap to cloth, are both produced and sold in villages.

Mechanisation of Agriculture : If agriculture has to be mechanised, it should be mechanised, as Gandhi pointed out, with machines that supplement human effort and ease or lighten its burden rather than supplant it—the Japanese style of farm machinery.

Capitalism and Communism : The capitalists are not happy with me because I am considered anti-heavy industry. Then take the communists. They are against me because I believe in individual rights and freedoms; and because I don't believe in state ownership of the means of production.

The Press : Now, it is difficult to call me dishonest, nor can anybody call me a dunce and say that I don't know anything; they (the press) can't say I am not popular, that I have not done any public work, that I have not devoted my life to the nation and made sacrifices. But then something or the other has to be said, and my caste comes handy—this is all they can do. So, it all boils down to this—that the man who should be sitting in a village and ploughing the field is not fit to be a political leader. He must be pulled down.

Nehru : His (Nehru's) heart was bent upon establishment of an industrial structure on the lines of the USA and the USSR and,

to that end, he decided to go hammer and tongs, both for foreign capital and foreign technology as also to divert all possible domestic resources to heavy industry even at the cost of food, water, clothing, housing, education and health.

Being Anti-Nehru : (Laughingly) That's because I had an ambition to become the prime minister. It was when I was revenue minister in Uttar Pradesh—it was a powerful portfolio—and Nehru wanted to introduce cooperative farming. I did not agree with him and he became angry with me. That was the reason why politics in Uttar Pradesh took a particular turn in the next decade. He elevated a man who was twice defeated in succession in the assembly elections rather than have me as the chief minister. And he said, Charan Singh is a reactionary! And I was called ambitious. You know, I have a dream of a world order where all people live together in peace. Now, I would like to be prime minister of that world government (laughter).

Bureaucracy : The present bureaucracy is fast developing into a hereditary caste and the doors of the higher echelons of government employment are virtually closed to the sons of those who are outside the charmed circle, particularly the villages.

Railwaymen's Bonus : Before clamouring for any increase in their emoluments, public employees must first establish a reputation for service, courtesy and responsiveness to the common man which is sadly lacking today.

Prohibition : I don't drink. I will try to desist you (journalists) by law from drinking.

Jan Sangh : So far as the Jan Sangh is concerned, it has no economic ideology of its own. So they have accepted our views avidly. There is no question of ideology involved in our differences with the Jan Sangh.

6

KISAN POWER

THE unexpected success of the Kisan rally has given rise to the hope that the peasantry, if organised, can be a political force. It is likely kisans will shape as the most powerful single factor to determine the outcome of Parliamentary and Assembly elections. Emerging as the powerful leader of this movement is Chaudhry Charan Singh.

It is not certain whether Charan Singh will compose his differences with the Prime Minister or join the Union Cabinet following the unity efforts now going on. But what is certain is that he will work for the acceleration of the Kisan movement formally launched in Delhi on his 77th birthday, December 23 last year.

The massive kisan rally, which even Mrs Indira Gandhi described soon after her

release from Tihar jail as a "tremendous success", has effectively proved that Charan Singh has a mass following among the peasants in the North. It has given him the strength and confidence he needed to fight the battle initiated after his "expulsion" from the Cabinet on June 29, 1978.

Charan Singh makes it clear, while addressing a meeting or talking to newsmen, that his battle is not entirely political. In an interview with me some days ago he talked particularly about the social and economic issues involved in the battle. At the same time he told me about the hurt Morarjibhai has caused him by ignominiously turning him out of the Cabinet. He also referred to his willingness to go to any length to maintain the unity of the party. "You know, I went to see him thrice," he said.

A Major Effort

The kisan rally has become, as a result of the infighting in the Janata Party, a major effort in independent India to organise the farmers, particularly those possessing small holdings, into a force to help a section of the party leaders to achieve political power. But, in the process, the organised strength of the kisans, if given further momentum, is sure to help them in seeking a solution to the basic problem of socio-economic disparity from which they have suffered for decades.

The first kisan rally held on December 23, 1977, was not considered an important event because its objective was only to celebrate the birthday of Charan Singh who, at that time, was not seriously involved in the race for leadership.

It was because of the non-political character of the rally that Nanaji Deshmukh, who is today apparently upset by the organisation of farmers under the leadership of Chaudhry Saheb, had presided over it. In his speech on the occasion he called him a leader of the farmers. Even the Foreign Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, addressed the rally. Obviously the Jan Sangh members of the Janata Party those days did not have the kind of strained relations they have today with Charan Singh. Party President Chandra Shekhar was also invited to attend the rally but he did not go on one pretext or another. Since then the impression has gained ground that Chandra Shekhar and Charan Singh belong to two different schools of thought.

That Charan Singh continues to be unhappy with Chandra Shekhar was clearly established when the former told me in the interview that the Party President had never taken action against those who criticised

and spoke ill of his political rivals. Charan Singh said that several leaders of the party had demanded his resignation and openly made malicious charges against him, but no action was ever initiated against them. Even when some prominent party leaders worked against the party candidates in the Samastipur and Fatehpur parliamentary by-elections, they were not so much as asked to explain their conduct. "How can you then run the party?" he asked.

According to some close associates of Charan Singh, when he was removed from the Cabinet and Morarji Desai refused to take him back, the idea of organising a massive rally of farmers was discussed and canvassed. It was believed that once it was conclusively proved that Charan Singh commanded the loyalty of the peasantry, Mr Desai would be inclined to take him back into his Cabinet. It was also then realised that a rally much bigger than the one held in December 1977 was not only possible but that it could be utilised to start a movement to create a powerful platform from which the demands for the solution of the problems of peasants could be made effectively.

The All-India Kisan Sammelan, set up in December 1977, was activated and given the responsibility of organising the rally in the month of September. It was, however, claimed that the rally had nothing to do with the political crisis Charan Singh was facing. It was said that he would only address the rally. But it was difficult to dissociate him from the rally. His lieutenant, Mr Raj Narain, was the President of the Sammelan and major decisions about the rally were taken at the residence of Charan Singh. The date for holding the rally was postponed several times till it was decided that it should

synchronise with the 77th birthday of Charan Singh. It was believed that by that time the situation would turn in favour of Charan Singh and the rally would provide an occasion to celebrate his victory. But this did not happen. Now what was expected to happen by December 23 last year, it is fervently hoped, would happen before the former BLD members and their supporters meet in Delhi on January 28 and 29 this year. (Earlier the dates fixed were February 1 and 2).

The unexpected success of the kisan rally has given the organisers considerable hope that the peasantry, if properly organised, can provide them with a sound political base. They now see that the organised peasantry will emerge as the most powerful single factor to determine the outcome of the parliamentary and Assembly elections in favour of those who are regarded as their leaders. But they also know that to secure this political support of the farmers they will have to fight for the change of their social and economic lot and get them the benefits of modernisation which today only the urbanites enjoy. It is this fight for the welfare of the farmers, particularly with small holdings, that is most likely to assume greater importance in the days to come.

Charan Singh has already built a strong case for the farmers, though his critics point out how he is opposed to any major land reform that is likely to disturb the landed rich (constituting about 7 per cent of the land-holding class) which largely controls the agricultural production and which enjoys the benefits of rural progress. It is his strong bias for the rural sector that was accepted as the economic policy of the Janata Party last year. According to him, "there are two main causes of our failure on the economic front: misallocation of

financial outlays between industry and agriculture, and introduction, rather multiplication, of the big machine. So there are two main remedies: revision of the allocations in favour of agriculture and discarding of the big machine to the extent possible".

Tardy Development

Charan Singh has decided to go on a tour of the country to strengthen the kisan movement and set up branches of the All-India Kisan Sammelan in the States. His contention is that rural development has been tardy since Independence. Even today, he says, 1,16,000 villages do not have drinking water. Those who worked for the farmers are given treatment lower than that given to the clerks in the city. He holds the IAS officers, belonging mostly to the cities, responsible for the backwardness in the villages, both social and economic. Only 14 per cent of these officers come from a rural background. The result is that the majority of IAS and other services do not have any understanding of rural problems.

Charan Singh is unhappy that the villages have been neglected in the matter of roads, transport, health and education. "It is a matter of shame", he says, "that even toilets have not been provided for the women in the villages". According to him a proposal was recently finalised to spend Rs 16 crores on holding a UN conference in Delhi. Out of this Rs 1.83 crores would be spent on the renovation of Vigyan Bhavan, venue of the conference. "Could not this money be allocated for tubewells in the villages where they are badly needed?" he asks.

It is not that the farmers were not organised earlier. Even before Independence, the Congress and some other

political parties had tried to bring them together on one platform. But the objective was primarily to secure their support for the political movement against the British Government. An idea of how Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had sought to arouse political consciousness among the farmers of Allahabad district in the early years of the freedom struggle is available from his autobiography.

But more than Panditji it was Mr Purshottamdas Tandon who devoted himself to organising the farmers in Uttar Pradesh. It was he who led the Kisan Sangh as the farmers' wing of the Congress. According to Charan Singh, the first real kisan movement in India was launched, though for a short time, by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel when he led the Bardoli Satyagraha in Gujarat in 1937. It was for the first time that the farmers were made conscious of the fact that they too could take part in the freedom struggle.

The farmers' wing of the CPI was then known as the Kisan Sabha and that of the Socialist Party as the Kisan Panchayat. Both parties, however, worked only for the landless in the village. It was the CPI which had spearheaded the Telangana movement of 1948. The extremists among the communists then called this movement *Khooni Karanti*.

Neglected

The concern of political parties for farmers was almost lost after we became independent. It was only in 1955 that an attempt was made afresh to set up an all-India organisation of farmers. The all-India Agriculturists Federation was formed by bringing all provincial bodies in the North and the South together. N.G. Ranga in the South and Choudhary Chotu Ram in the

North played an important role. Even Charan Singh concedes that Ranga has sincerely worked for the welfare of the farmers and has no political motive to serve. Choudhary Chotu Ram, as Minister of Punjab, did commendable work for farmers.

When the Nagpur session of the AICC in 1959 adopted the resolution on cooperative farming, approved by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the supporters of "peasant farming" raised their voice against it. Among them were Charan Singh and N.G. Ranga. In his book, *India's Poverty and Its Solution*, written soon after the Nagpur session, Charan Singh strongly defended "peasant farming" against cooperative farming which he argued, would cause dislocation of the village economy. Bhai Kaka, a well-known kisan leader of Gujarat, formed the Khedat Sangh to fight against any attempt to introduce cooperative farming. It was the opposition to this farming, likely to be introduced on the initiative of Pandit Nehru that led to the formation of the Swatantra Party in 1959. The lead was taken by Mr Ranga who succeeded in bringing Rajaji into the party and later making him its head. Mr Ranga is today a prominent leader of the Congress (I).

When compulsory levy was introduced by the Central Government in 1973, the kisan leaders, particularly in Haryana, launched a struggle against it. In Haryana leaders like Devi Lal, Chand Ram and Swami Agnivesh organised the farmers against the levy. It was after a gap of about four years that the All-India Kisan Sammelan was formed in December 1977. M.R. Arya, now one of the General Secretaries of the Delhi Pradesh Janata Party, was the spirit behind the Sammelan then. Several State Chief Ministers like

Bharon Singh Shekhawat, the Mayor of Delhi, Mr R.K. Gupta, and Nanaji Deshmukh were closely associated with the Sammelan of which Raj Narain was President.

Even Ranga, who is very close to Mrs Indira Gandhi today, admits that Charan Singh is the sole leader of the farmers, both of the lower and middle class, in North India. According to him, Chaudhuri Saheb will be able to organise the peasants because they are more conscious today. "Caste and politics" will have a multiplier effect in creating a force of farmers which can be used for both political and socio-economic purposes.

Some other Congress (I) leaders also are aware of the loyalty and support Charan Singh enjoys among the upper caste Hindus, small and big land-holding classes and even the landless in the villages. They also admit that he has about 20 per cent of Harijans in the rural areas as his followers. His campaign for the growth and expansion of small-scale and cottage industries is intended to benefit the landless. He wants the poor and the downtrodden among the peasantry to shift to these industries for employment which in turn would help industrialise the country in the real sense.

But even Charan Singh knows that he will not be able to completely alienate the Harijans, agricultural labourers and village artisans from Mrs. Gandhi. These sections of rural society still look upon her as their leader. The family planning excesses committed during the Emergency had turned them against her. But following the failures of the Janata Party to deliver the goods they have gone back to her. Visit to places like Belchi has helped restore to Mrs Gandhi the image she had lost during the Emergency. She will do her best to

keep this image intact. The more she succeeds in winning back the poor in all communities, the more discomfiture the Janata Party will suffer.

Since Charan Singh represents the classes which have been traditionally opposed to the Harijans, backward communities and village artisans and also to radical reforms, he has to persuade his followers to give up their age-old prejudices and help promote social and economic justice for those who have so far been deprived of it. Only then can he emerge as an unchallenged leader of the teeming millions in the villages. But even he knows that it is not easy.

The prejudices based on the exploitative social and economic system for decades cannot be given up so easily and so quickly. Even among the classes that are loyal to him there is rivalry against one another. Casteism and panchayati politics have for long turned about 30 to 40 per cent of the rural community against the locally dominated kisan leaders. It will perhaps take several decades of dedicated work among the peasantry to root these prejudices.

The Two Mass Leaders

Thus it is clear that today there are only two mass leaders, one Indira Gandhi and the other Charan Singh. Fortunately, both represent those sections of society which have largely remained neglected and which have not been touched by the benefit of the economic progress the country has made since 1947. Will not the politics of the country undergo a sea change, making major social and economic changes possible, if Mrs Gandhi and Charan Singh join hands to come into power ?

This is a natural question that arises in the minds of those who have analysed the situation in the country the way it has been done above. It is this question which led many of Mrs Gandhi's supporters to persuade her to give up her unhappiness with Charan Singh and seek an alliance with him. The possibility of this alliance was seen for the first time when Charan Singh was undergoing treatment in the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi in June last year. It was then that Mrs Gandhi had sent him a bouquet wishing him early recovery.

It was in continuation of that effort that she again sent him a bouquet on his 77th birthday. The day Mrs Gandhi was being released from Tihar Jail, a Congress (I) leader, close to her, told me that the Janata Party would remain in power only for a week. He was sure that the Desai Government would be thrown out in the next few days by an alliance between Mrs Gandhi and Mr Charan Singh. The decision of the National Executive of the Janata Party to win back Charan Singh might have dampened the enthusiasm of the Congress (I) leaders but they have not given up the hope.

The way Charan Singh and his close associates have begun building up the kisan movement, covering not only the land-holding class but also those whom he calls "kamgars" (agricultural labourers and village artisans), has naturally caused a fierce debate on agriculture *vs* industry and brought the clash between the urbanites and ruralites into sharp focus. There is no denying the fact that his strong critics are those who believe that an industry-based economy alone suits the country.

What, according to them, will be the consequences if Charan Singh's economic

philosophy, reflected in the 20-point charter, becomes the basis of the country's development plans? If his demand for export of agricultural commodities is accepted, it will cause inflation which the country can ill afford today; subsidisation of sale of water, power, fertilisers and seeds to the farmers would result in heavy budgetary deficit; and urban life will be disrupted if urban incomes are reduced to raise the rural incomes. It is said that the approach of Mr Charan Singh is such that it would deny resources to modern industry and put a halt to the process of modernisation. In fact, it would cause stagnation of agriculture as the industry would not be able to produce the inputs needed by it.

Is It A Realistic Policy ?

The consequences of diverting funds from industry to agriculture appear to be serious when we see that the contribution of the industrial sector to the GNP has been about 77 per cent against only 33 per cent by the agricultural sector. If the emphasis has to be shifted from industry to agriculture, what would happen to the investment of about Rs 68,000 crores made in the private and public sectors since 1947? The role of small and cottage industries has also not been considered encouraging. Forty-six per cent of these industries are today managed by big industrial houses and some multinationals. About Rs 38,000 crores have been invested in this sector since 1947 but its contribution to the GNP is only 12 per cent. How can these industries create jobs and maintain the rate of economic growth if the expansion of heavy industries is brought to a standstill? Can the nation wait and suffer the setback to its progress till Charan Singh's economic policy begins giving the results he assures, assuming that his policy is realistic?

Countering these arguments, Charan Singh says that the opposition to his economic thought comes from three sections : first, the big industrialists who have benefited most from the Plan allocations made since the First Five-Year Plan; second, organised sections of employees in urban areas who fear that the organised kisans would deny the gains they have been making; and, third, urbanites who do not want to share the benefits of modernisation with the rural people.

Parity of price is going to be the main demand of the kisan movement. Once it is accepted, economic priorities will have to be recast and certain fundamental changes made in economic structure. The kisan, under the leadership of Charan Singh, is going to demand higher prices for his produce to pay the heavy charges for fertilisers and power, and to be subsidised by the Government.

No longer will the farmers remain idle for nine months in a year. The landless and the poor will not be economically exploited as they would get jobs in these industries. And the pressure on the land will be considerably reduced, thus accelerating agricultural production. The agricultural labourers and workers in small-scale industries will also get higher wages though a sense of competition may develop between them and the peasants as there is today between the city dweller and the peasant.

The kisan movement is also sure to bring about some basic social changes. An economically rich and educated youth from the rural area will no longer suffer from the discrimination he faces today. This will mean a vast social and psychological change in attitude. The city-bred will not be able to claim higher service as their exclusive preserve. The introduction of regional

languages as media of examination for the IAS and other Central Services is definitely going to bring in more youths from the villages into the higher echelons of administration. No longer will public school education be considered important for an administrative post. The new administrators with a rural background and ethos will change social values and norms.

— *Illustrated Weekly of India*

International Comment on the Kisan Rally

The Guardian (Manchester—England) : Peter Niesewand writes : "On his 77th birthday on December 23, Charan Singh called a rally of his supporters and it turned out to be the biggest ever held in New Delhi....."

Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong) : "On December 23 Charan Singh and his aides were able to draw between 600,000 and one million farmers.....The kisan (farmer) rally has demonstrated that no other leader commands the popular backing in the manner that Charan Singh does."

National Comment on the Kisan Rally

The Fortnight (New Delhi) : "It is the biggest rally of its kind in recent memory, and it gives birth to what could well be a vital organised new force in India's body politics."

The Tribune (Chandigarh) :
"WORLD'S BIGGEST RALLY."

The Sunday Statesman (Delhi) :
"MOST PEACEFUL RALLY."

TWO HISTORIC DOCUMENTS :
KISAN MANIFESTO FOR A GANDHIAN
ECONOMY : moved by Mr Rabi Ray and
seconded by Mr S.N. Misra.

DECLARATION ON THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY AND CHARTER OF DEMANDS : moved by Mr. R.K. Amin and seconded by Mr. M.R. Bagri.

From the Kisan Manifesto : "The tendency to exploit the rural sector has gained a new momentum and the personal wealth and the social advancement of a few people in the countryside cannot hide the fact that the vast majority of India's rural population have suffered serious setbacks to their economic status"....."We the KISANS OF INDIA, from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari and from Dwarka to Kamakhya hail the inspiring vision of a new social order given by Chaudhry Charan Singh, and are determined to organise our full capacity for a direct attack on mass poverty through rural mobilisation on a scale which will make our movement a glorious chapter in the history of mankind."

From the Charter of Demands : "We demand parity in prices in order to make the terms of trade more favourable to the farmers without delay". "We propose that a KISAN BANK be established which would give credit from 4 to 6 per cent throughout the country and would also convert credits taken at existing exorbitant rates. The low costs of credit would be extended also to the cottage and other labour intensive industries". "We the KISANS OF INDIA will defend our democracy but we are fighting now to have democracy in the field of economy also..." "We demand opportunities for increased agricultural production in national interest through a system of adequate prices". "All unnecessary controls, restrictions, requirements of sanctions.....should be abolished". "Financial resources should be diverted for the development of agriculture, irrigation, roads, tubewells, dams, bridges, warehouses, cold storages, small and

cottage industries, dairies, fisheries, rural electrification..." "1. Implementation of economic policy by Janata Party. 2. Correction of imbalance between Industry and Agriculture. 3. Export Import policy in accordance with Agricultural needs. 4. Representation for farmers. 5. Agricultural inputs at low prices. 6. Holdings below 1.25 hectares—tax exemption. 7. Buffer stocks and implementation of support prices. 8. Removal of excise duties. 9. Planning from below. 10. Income disparity between rural and urban to be reduced to 1 : 1.5. 11. Genuine service by development blocks to farmers. 12. Agricultural polytechnics in every district. 13. Kisan banks. 14. Representation to women at every level of panchyati raj. 15. Irrigation budget 20% of investment. 16. 50% of additional electricity for rural areas. 17. Implementation of land reforms. 18. Work guarantee schemes. 19. Republic bodies for decentralisation of economic and political power. 20. Honourable place for women in Indian society.

What are the Precepts of Chaudhry Charan Singh ?

From the Kisan Manifesto : "The precepts of Chaudhry Charan Singh based upon a penetrating study of the actual conditions of the Indian countryside, and his personal commitment to the eradication of corruption in public life are the precious possession of the millions who have joined to meet the challenge of national resurgence through the uplift of India's rural population."

THE RATIONALE OF A REVOLT BY CHARAN SINGH

NOW that the dust of the race for securing the vote of Members of Parliament has settled down, I would like to draw the attention of the people to certain milestones on the political canvas of the country during the recent years.

In 1974 and 1975, my colleagues and I of the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD) requested the leaders of the Jan Sangh, the Congress (O) and the Socialist Party a hundred times to join hands with us in forging a united political organisation, consisting of the then existing democratic parties. But none of them would respond. Had they done so, perhaps the country would have been spared the pains of the Emergency.

The Jan Sangh and the Socialist Party came round only after they had been thrown behind the prison bars, and the

Congress (O), only after its leader, Morarji Desai, had been released and he saw immediate prospects of power in the announcement of parliamentary elections that the Government of India had simultaneously made.

Popular faith shattered

We, particularly of the BLD, had entertained dreams of replacing the political setup that existed in 1976 by one which was by and large inspired by the teachings of Gandhiji, especially those which had a bearing on the questions of individual freedom, poverty, unemployment, concentration of economic power and integrity in public life.

The people of the country, particularly in the northern parts, gave us a vote of confidence which was, perhaps, unparalleled

in the annals of democracy. To our regret, however, all these dreams were shattered soon.

No worker of the Janata Party—if ever there was a “**Janata Party**” in existence in the true sense of the term—could claim that his Government had succeeded in cleansing public life, in improving the administration of the country or giving a new hope to the masses.

Misconduct in high places

On the contrary, there are hard facts about the conduct of more than one bigwig in the party and its Government at the Centre which would make every Indian hang his head in shame but, inasmuch as truth will always be out sooner or later, I leave it to time to narrate the story of this misconduct in high places.

Owing to lack of understanding and political will on the part of the Janata Government's leadership, the country had been brought to the brink of economic and administrative chaos which was never witnessed before.

The Government had little or no rapport with the masses, particularly the poor, the weak or the downtrodden and, therefore, was not aware of the stirrings of their hearts. Morarji Desai is, by nature, incapable of wiping out the tears from any eye.

Morarji leaned on RSS prop

Lastly, in the extraordinary success which the Janata Party achieved in the elections to Parliament in March 1977 from the northern part of the country that was my special charge, and in the extraordinary gatherings of villagers that converged on

Delhi on the occasion of my birthday on December 23, 1977, and on the same date in 1978, the Prime Minister saw a threat to his high office.

In order to checkmate this imaginary threat, he increasingly leaned on the RSS and adopted other attitudes which only served to encourage communal trends in our society that will disrupt it still further instead of welding it into a stronger or more homogeneous whole.

Inordinate lust for power

All these failures and shortcomings could be traced to one single cause—that is, while he did not entertain any vision about the future of the country or nurse any ambitions about its prosperity or role in the comity of nations, Morarji Desai had developed an inordinate desire to stick to power, at least till 1982, and wanted to be left in peace till then.

He could not, therefore, take bold decisions, nor could he reshuffle his Cabinet which the dictates of efficiency and integrity so clearly demanded.

After my reinduction into the Cabinet on January 24, 1979, the Prime Minister and his chief lieutenants saw to it that my co-workers of the erstwhile BLD were systematically decimated—removed from positions of power in the States and eliminated altogether from the party organisation.

Ouster of BLD stalwarts

Those who had made little or no contribution to the emergence of the Janata Party decided to kick away the ladder on the strength of which they had ascended the pinnacles of power.



The Prime Minister Chaudhry Charan Singh is seen with Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Y.B. Chavan, Opposition leader Mr. Jagjivan Ram and Mr. C.M. Stephen at PM's Office in Parliament House.



The President of India Mr. Sanjiva Reddy with Mr. Charan Singh at Rashtrapati Bhawan when he invited him to form the Government.



The Janata (S) President Mr. Raj Narain and the Prime Minister Chaudhry Charan Singh

The two Chief Ministers belonging to the erstwhile BLD group, Ram Naresh Yadav of UP, and Karpoori Thakur of Bihar, were overthrown at the initiative of the Centre. The way a meeting of the dissident Haryana legislators was convened at the house of the Prime Minister on June 6, came as the last straw on the camel's back.

Drunk with power, the Prime Minister went to the extent of exhorting the Haryana leaders to keep firm and united in their resolve to oust Devi Lal.

Rampant bias and discrimination

To give one more example of discrimination out of so many, no report was submitted by, nor any questions asked, of a senior Jan Sangh Minister who had been deputed by the Janata Parliamentary Board at my instance to enquire into serious allegations against the Chairman of the Party, Chandra Shekhar, and the Jan Sangh Chief Minister of Rajasthan for manoeuvring the election of their own men from the Bihar and Rajasthan Assemblies, respectively, for the Rajya Sabha at the cost of defeat of the official candidates in the early part of the current year.

So far as our position in the party organisation was concerned, of the election panels constituted by the Chairman of the Party in November 1978, the erstwhile BLD constituent did not find a place in the Central Election Panel and the two State panels of Gujarat and Rajasthan at all.

Whereas in the UP panel, out of six members, one member was allotted to the BLD, and two to the former Congress (O) which was able to secure only 10 seats out of 425 in the Assembly elections of 1974 and whose leader had forfeited his security,

Raj Narain ousted on false excuse

The Ad Hoc State Committee appointed by the Chairman in 1977 was another eloquent testimony to his sense of prejudice against the erstwhile BLD. The idea behind the constitution of the various organs of the Janata Party was to equate one constituent with another and everybody with everybody else, irrespective of merits or the past record.

Raj Narain had been ousted in June, 1978, on a false and ridiculous excuse. Understandably enough, he became somewhat bitter and I had to publicly differ from him more than once. I never complained against the disciplinary action that was taken against him.

In contrast to this, the people will recollect that although about 100 legislators of UP, belonging to the Jan Sangh and Chandra Shekhar's group, had voted against the Janata Government of the State on a money bill in March last, they were none the worse for it. No disciplinary action was taken against them at all.

The attitude of our friends, reflected in the above acts, has to be contrasted with three hard facts: (A) It was virtually the BLD leadership that brought the Janata Party into existence, despite the reluctance of the other constituents, (B) It was I who was more instrumental in raising the Prime Minister to his august office than anybody else in the Janata Party, as a result whereof I earned the hostility of some powerful elements in the party and, (C) Severally, the erstwhile BLD occupied a far wider place in the affections of the people than any other constituent of the party.

Overwhelmed by events

My co-workers and a few like-minded friends, therefore, met on June 21 in Delhi

just to survey the present scene and contemplate the future that awaited them. Much against my wishes, I was asked to spell out a strategy for self-preservation.

Few people will believe it when I tell them that I never imagined, much less planned, the turn or shape that the political events in Delhi have taken since July 9. As recently as June 24, I had publicly reprimanded my closest friend, Raj Narain, for having made a statement which, in my opinion, was likely to warp the image of the Janata Party.

I had not yet been able to thrash out the steps that were necessary to undo the injustice under which the erstwhile BLD were smarting when I was overwhelmed by events which eroded my pull or influence with them almost completely.

Kanti scandal was last straw

The Prime Minister went on to remark at a press conference on June 26 in the context of Raj Narain's resignation from the Janata Party that if other members of the erstwhile BLD also left the party, they would do so at their peril and it would make no difference to the stability of his Government. How this observation inflicted a wound that was difficult to heal or forget !

Secondly, facts which came to light as a result of the raids made by officers of the Finance Ministry at the office premises of P. N. Balasubramaniam on June 4 and 6, pointing to the complicity of the Prime Minister's son, Kantilal Desai, in his business deals brought the Government down greatly in the estimation of my friends and the public in general.

The image of a Prime Minister, in fact of any public worker that I have projected

before my co-workers and the people all my life, is far different from the one that Morarji Desai exemplifies.

Janata harmed public cause

Finally a no-confidence motion, which the Opposition tabled on July 9, provided an opportunity to my friends and co-workers which I could not prevent them from availing.

Public memory being short, I am putting only a few facts on record so that they might be enabled to make a correct appreciation of the political situation that obtains in the country today.

Much more has been done by the custodians of public interest during the last 28 months to harm public cause than anybody can imagine or relate.

BLITZ Weekly, August 4, 1979

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FIRST PEASANT PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

THE search for a successor to Mr Morarji Desai, the first non-Congress Prime Minister of India, who resigned on July 15, unable to face a no-confidence motion in the Lok Sabha, ended last week when President Sanjiva Reddy invited Mr Charan Singh, leader of the break-away Janata group, to form a government. The President made the offer to Mr Charan Singh, who had formed an alliance with the Congress, after an examination of the rival claims made by him and Mr Desai following Congress leader Y. B. Chavan's inability to form a government.

The scrutiny showed that Mr Charan Singh had a larger backing of Lok Sabha members (262) than Mr Desai (236), implying that even Mr Charan Singh did not have an absolute majority in the House which had an effective strength of 539. This inadequacy was very much in the

President's mind when he offered Prime Ministership to Mr Charan Singh. The President's letter to Charan Singh said : "I trust that in accordance with the highest democratic traditions and in the interest of establishing healthy conventions you would seek a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha at the earliest possible opportunity, say by the third week of August 1979."

As he came out of Rashtrapati Bhavan, after receiving the letter of assignment, the Prime Minister-designate appeared to be confident of fulfilling the democratic norms prescribed by President Reddy. He listed his priorities as eliminating unemployment and poverty to the extent possible, narrowing down the gap between the rich and poor, and building a healthy, classless society.

These programmes, he said, had been conceived by him earlier. Now it would be

his first duty to create an atmosphere for integrity in public life and in which the people did not feel choked and restrained. "My being Prime Minister will obviously mean more money for agriculture and the villages and, above all, it will mean more honesty among public servants". To the 77-year-old Kisan leader, it was as if "the ambition of my life has been fulfilled".

Straight from Rashtrapati Bhavan, Mr Charan Singh drove to Mr Chavan's house and invited the Congress Party to join his government.

The outgoing Prime Minister, Mr Morarji Desai, said the President's decision to invite Charan Singh to form a government would sanctify defections. "The process of political defections has acquired a holy grab today," Mr Desai said. According to Mr Chandra Shekhar, Janata President, Mr Reddy's decision was tantamount to putting a premium on defection which had been deplored by all sections of the people.

Mrs Indira Gandhi did not try to conceal her happiness at the fall of the Desai Ministry. She said her party had been campaigning for a change in the government. "I am glad the Janata Party is gone", she said.

At his first Press conference, Mr Charan Singh made it abundantly clear that there was no question of the Congress (I) participating in the government. Reports of his secret meeting with Mrs Gandhi were an "unmitigated lie", he said.

In a scathing attack on Mr Desai's performance, Mr Charan Singh said: "No worker of the Janata Party—if ever there was a 'Janata Party' in existence in the true sense of the term—could claim that his

government had succeeded in cleansing public life, in improving the administration of the country or giving a new hope to the masses. On the contrary, there are hard facts about the conduct of more than one bigwig in the party and its government at the Centre which would make every Indian hang down his head in shame but, inasmuch as truth will always be out sooner or later, I leave it to time to narrate the story of this misconduct in high places."

Eleven days after Mr Desai submitted his resignation as Prime Minister, the political impasse in New Delhi had continued with President Sanjiva Reddy unable initially to decide who enjoyed the support of the majority of the members in the Lok Sabha. But after the withdrawal of two of the aspirants for Prime Ministership from the arena—Mr Y. B. Chavan (Congress) and Mr Jagjivan Ram (Janata)—the battlelines had become clear and sharp between Mr Desai, solidly backed by the Janata Party, and Mr Charan Singh backed by the Janata (S), Congress and Congress (I).

After Mr Chavan, who had been asked by the President to form an alternative Government, expressed his inability to do so, President Sanjiva Reddy asked both Mr Desai and Mr Charan Singh to submit to him lists of their supporters to enable him to come to a conclusion as to which of the rival combinations would be able to provide a stable Government. But when the lists were submitted by the two contenders, it did not make the task of the President any easier.

For, both the lists claimed the support of 279 Lok Sabha members. In a House with an effective strength of 538 members, and with at least 38 of them (belonging to the CPM, the RSP, the Forward Block and

the Akali Dal) declaring that they were neutral in the tussle between Mr Desai and Mr Charan Singh it was clear that there was a substantial overlapping between the two lists.

What would the President do ? Since there was no precedent, it was pointed out that the President would have to innovate and the process could be sending out summons to the common members figuring in the two lists to parade at Rashtrapati Bhavan or seeking the assistance of Speaker K. S. Hegde to ascertain the final views of the members concerned either through balloting or interviews. From all available accounts, the contest between Mr Desai and Mr Charan Singh appeared to be very close.

The Janata experts questioned the figures of 92 for Janata-S, 15 Socialists, 75 Congress and two Muslim League members shown on Mr Charan Singh's list. They pointed out that the Socialists with Mr Charan Singh (meaning the George Fernandes group) had no more than 10 with them while six among the 75 Congress members and four of Janata-S's 92 are claimed to have already switched their support to Mr Desai. As for the two Muslim League members, they pointed out, only one could participate in voting, the other being involved in an election petition.

Similar doubts about Mr Desai's supporters were raised by the alliance experts. They questioned Janata's claimed support of 11 independents and United Parliamentary Group members and the 22 listed under an omnibus heading of "different parties".

Mr Raj Narain presented to the President's Secretary the list on behalf of

Mr Charan Singh. The list of Mr Desai's supporters was brought to Rashtrapati Bhavan as the deadline of 48 hours set by the President to the rival contenders was drawing to a close. Even then the documents by way of supporting evidence were not presented along with the list. According to reports, Mr Desai made an unsuccessful attempt for extension of time from President Reddy. Mr Charan Singh lost no time in taking advantage of this secretarial lapse on the part of Janata, and wrote to the President requesting him not to admit any supporting evidence as the deadline for submitting documented claims was over.

To the Janata Party, already weakened by the exodus to the Janata (S), more agony was in store earlier in the week with Mr Desai refusing to step down from the leadership of the Parliamentary Party and Mr Jagjivan Ram at one time staking a claim for leadership. But strong pressure from their supporters culminated in the two leaders reconciling their differences. This paved the way for Mr Jagjivan Ram declaring that he would not come in the way of Mr Morarji Desai forming a government. After a meeting with Mr Desai, Mr Jagjivan Ram said : "We are both one and together."

Yet another move was made by the Janata leadership to attract MPs to its fold, this related to the thorny issue of dual membership. At the instance of Mr Desai, the RSS leadership agreed to amend its constitution debarring members of Parliament and State legislatures from taking part in the day-to-day activities of the RSS. According to RSS general secretary Rajendra Singh, the amendment would be brought before the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha, the general council of the RSS, soon. Janata President Chandra

Shekhar said those of his party members who had left on the ground of the former Jan Sangh members' links with the RSS should now have no difficulty in returning to the Janata fold.

A substantial gain for the Janata during a week of intense political activity was the support of the AIADMK which has 18 members in the Lok Sabha.

Even when the Presidential offer to Mr Chavan to explore the possibilities of forming a government was made, it was clear that he would not be able to do so. But Mr Chavan took all the four days given to him before telling the President that he had not succeeded in his efforts. Instead, he said a combination of parties and groups had emerged "which to my mind would be able to provide a viable and stable government". He was clearly pointing to the alliance headed by Mr Charan Singh.

The Congress Working Committee, which met soon after decided to accept Mr Charan Singh as the leader of the new alliance. Mr Charan Singh lost no time in opening up a dialogue with the Congress (I) to ensure its support for establishing a majority in the Lok Sabha for his alliance. And, the Congress (I) response was total and without reservations. The Congress (I) Parliamentary Board, which considered Mr Charan Singh's request, offered "whole-hearted" support. The Congress (I) would not however, join the new government.

During the contacts between the two sides, a new cordiality and warmth was evident, indicating that the political wind had completely changed when Mr Charan Singh emerged from discussions with Mr Kamalapati Tripathi and Mr C.M. Stephen. They were greeted with slogans like "Long live Mrs Gandhi", "Long live the prospective Prime Minister Charan Singh.

Once Mrs Gandhi's support to Mr Charan Singh became known, opposition within the Congress party to its alliance with the Janata (S) leader was growing. Senior members of the party, including Dr Karan Singh and Mr T.A. Pai, and five MPs from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka wanted a meeting of the Parliamentary Party to be called "to discuss the alliance in depth". By joining the alliance they would be backing a government which would be totally dependent for its survival upon Mrs Gandhi.

In a statement, Mr Charan Singh sought to correct this impression that by accepting the support of the Congress (I) he had done nothing "to compromise my relentless fight against communalism and authoritarianism".

Mr Pai and Dr Karan Singh told newsmen that the Party's decision had been taken without the participation of the Parliamentary Party. On their part, the six MPs asked Mr Chavan to delete their names from the list of Congress supporters which Charan Singh had submitted to the President.

Both the lists, it seemed, contained the names of the nine Akalis. Mr Raj Narain said Akali leaders had extended support to Charan Singh. But a statement issued by the Akalis said they had decided to remain neutral. And, to observe neutrality, Mr Surjit Singh Barnala and Mr Dhanna Singh Gulshan had been asked to withdraw from Desai's caretaker Government.

Meanwhile, the Election Commissioner, Mr S.L. Shakhder, said a snap poll to the Lok Sabha could be held in three months after Parliament is dissolved and on the basis of a "crash programme" for a revision of the electoral rolls which had become obsolete by four years.

Following is the latest Party position in the Lok Sabha, according to the Lok Sabha Secretariat :

Janata	205
Congress	75
Congress-I	72
Janata-S	77
CPM	22
AIADMK	18
Akali Dal	9
CPI	7
PWP	6
United Parliamentary Front	5
RSP	4
Forward Block	3
Muslim League	2
National Conference	2
Republican (Khobragade Group)	2
Independents (include 15 of those who have left Janata Party but not informed the Secretariat of joining any group)	29
Vacancies	5
Speaker	1
TOTAL	544

Overseas Hindustan Times, April 2, 1979

Charan Singh Chosen as Prime Minister

The 10-day-long battle for Prime Ministership has ended in favour of Charan Singh, the 77-year-old Ghaziabad lawyer who has all his life walked in and out of political parties, formed and disbanded them in search of national recognition. That has now taken him to No. 1 Safdarjang Road. The battle was tough and the outcome never so certain as to give him or his 82-year-old rival, Morarji Desai, a minute's respite all these days. Yet, if he has eventfully overcome great odds, it is mainly due to his tenacity and his long-held faith

that timely compromise is the key to success.

For some days after he walked out of the Janata Party, which he himself had helped build two years ago, Charan Singh's future looked quite uncertain. He seemed to have gambled for too much with too little in hand. But with H. N. Bahuguna and Biju Patnaik leaving the Janata Party to work for him, there was more going for him than otherwise. And then George Fernandes also rushed out of the Janata Party, in a huff, together with a dozen of his Socialist friends. The fate of the Morarji Desai Government was sealed. It had lost its majority in the House of the People. Morarji Desai hesitated for long hours even as leaders of different factions within the truncated party kept building up pressures on him to step down as party leader in favour of Jagjivan Ram or Chandra Shekhar. Finally, he half satisfied them—drove to the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the evening and handed over the resignation of his Government to President Sanjiva Reddy. (But in the party he kept up back to the wall fight.)

That was on Sunday, July 15. Then began the battle for the Prime Ministership in right earnest. Charan Singh had by that time drawn some 60 followers out of the Janata Party in addition to the three groups headed by Bahuguna, Patnaik and Fernandes, who all totalled another 30 or so. There was still much ground to cover to secure majority support in the 538-member Lok Sabha. The Congress was expected to extend support to him but dissensions seemed to have crept in over the issue. However, the Congress leadership responded quickly to the developing political crisis by offering to cooperate in evolving an alternative to the care-taker Government of Morarji Desai.

There was speculation about what President Sanjiva Reddy would do. Some baseless apprehensions were dispelled, but the President's references to a "national Government" continued to be discussed. It was said the President had suggested that leaders of parties like Morarji Desai, Y. B. Chavan and Indira Gandhi and others should consider the idea, in the absence of clear alternatives. Exaggerated rumours in this regard, and about the President's interest in it were firmly and officially scotched from Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The situation took a new turn when the President sent an invitation to Y. B. Chavan as the leader of the recognised opposition in the Lok Sabha, to explore the possibility of forming a Government. The invitation was considered to be a mere formality and a matter of constitutional propriety. Even most Congress leaders considered it as such but then Chavan took it seriously. The call from the President came when Chavan was sitting in a meeting with his Congress Working Committee colleagues at the Raisina Road office of the AICC. The telephone call from Rashtrapati Bhavan came just when the CWC members were debating the possible shape of an alternative to the Desai Government. Some of those present had begun suggesting that instead of lending support to Charan Singh, the Congress should itself explore the possibility of forming a Government with his help. The suggestion looked preposterous to most other leaders, who felt amused when V. B. Raju promised to present a list of 120 supporters (75 Congress MPs plus 45 others from different parties) only if the other leaders would take his suggestion seriously. It was at this stage that Chavan left the meeting to call on the President.

He returned to the meeting with the President's letter inviting him to explore the possibility of forming a viable and stable Government. The CWC meeting ended amidst jubilation. Chavan announced to waiting newsmen that he would report to the President in "three to four days" which meant that he would see what chances there were for the Congress to form the Government. Many Congress leaders were not hopeful, a fact Chavan himself realised soon. Chavan called in his associates like C. Subramaniam, Hitendra Desai, K.C. Pant and K.P. Unnikrishnan for talks. He asked them to begin negotiations with Charan Singh's camp for forming a Government under his leadership. When Subramaniam, Pant and Desai took the proposal to Charan Singh's advisers like S.N. Mishra, Raj Narain and R.K. Amin, they were surprised that Chavan should seek their support to his claim for leadership. After all, they had not undertaken their own arduous venture to make Chavan the Prime Minister. They told the Congress negotiators at the very first meeting that the leadership question was not at all negotiable, and that short of that they could discuss other issues. Although Subramaniam, Pant, Desai and others made it clear to Chavan after the first few rounds of talks with the Janata-S negotiators that they saw no possibility of Charan Singh ever accepting him as the leader of an alternative Government or of an alternative emerging without Charan Singh as its leader. Chavan did not seem to appreciate their point much. In fact, some of his close friends said that he was feeling rather let down, for he thought that his Congress colleagues were not making enough efforts to make him the Prime Minister. At this stage, V.P. Naik, S.S. Ray and Mohanlal Sukhadia, the three unity

protagonists, entered the scene. They also had hopes that Chavan could be made the Prime Minister only if the Congress was ready to seize the initiative. They began contacting leaders like Bahuguna and Patnaik to find out whether they would be willing to support Chavan if he was able to muster necessary support from other parties—which obviously meant the Congress-I.

However, none of the two leaders found the proposition feasible. The three leaders then went to Indira Gandhi and asked her whether she would be willing to help Chavan become the Prime Minister. They also told her that her gesture could pave the way for the eventual unity of the two Congresses. However, Indira Gandhi refused point-blank. She told them that she had already committed her support to Charan Singh. She also made it clear to them that Chavan stood no chance of being the Prime Minister with the Cong-I backing, and also that she would think twice to even let him join a ministry which depended on her party's support. However, for at least two days, they did not give up their hopes and kept visiting Indira Gandhi every morning and evening.

All this time Indira Gandhi kept her options open. Though it was known that she had committed her support to Charan Singh as early as in February-March, 1978 itself, she did not announce her decision officially. She was obviously waiting for Chavan to reach a deadend before making any public pronouncement on her party's stand. That Chavan's emissaries were trying to win Indira Gandhi's support was soon known to Charan Singh's camp. In fact, while Sukhadia and Naik were coming out of Indira Gandhi's house, they found themselves face to face with Charan Singh's lieutenants S.N. Mishra and Raj Narain,

who had also gone to urge her to publicly declare her support for their leader to deflate Chavan before he was able to play any mischief. Both the groups felt embarrassed. Then both smiled and waved at each other. "God bless you", said Sukhadia, waving at Raj Narain and Mishra.

After trying for three days, Chavan came to the conclusion that there was no use trying to collect a majority behind him. He gave in on the fourth day before a meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Board. But he was reluctant to suggest the name of Charan Singh as a new leader. And it was only after several important leaders of the party told him that there was no way out of the impasse but to accept the Janata-S leader as the Prime Minister that he himself proposed at the CPB meeting that the Congress support Charan Singh in his bid to form a Government. The decision was endorsed by the CWC in the afternoon, hoping to become the leader. He was even assured the necessary support by the Jan Sangh faction. However, when the Jan Sangh faction suddenly shifted its loyalty to Jagjivan Ram, he felt enraged and changed his own stance. Earlier he was also among those who demanded that Desai step down from his office. But once he saw that the Jan Sangh was deserting him, he took a somersault and began backing Morarji. He went to the extent of threatening to resign from his party post if Morarji Desai was ousted forcibly.

War of Nerves

The war of nerves between the three leaders continued for a week, when the Jan Sangh suddenly realised that valuable time was being lost in settling the unseemly controversy in the party. Soon, the Jan Sangh again switched its loyalty to Desai

and began pressuring Jagjivan Ram also to fall in line with it. By that time Jagjivan Ram's all other options had been closed. He had at one time established contacts with Chavan through Mohammed Shafi Qureshi, AICC general secretary, and A.P. Shinde. But he hesitated for a long time, and by the time he came to realise that he had no chance of becoming the leader in the Janata Party it was too late to open fresh negotiations with the Congress, for the party by then had committed its support to Charan Singh. At this juncture, the Jan Sangh brought about an agreement between Desai and Jagjivan Ram. The agreement provided that Desai would step down from the Prime Ministership and the leadership of the party in favour of Jagjivan Ram after seeing through the current session of Parliament if Jagjivan Ram agreed to support him in his attempt to foil Charan Singh's attempt to oust him.

However, even after that the three top leaders of the party—Morarji Desai, Chandra Shekhar and Jagjivan Ram—found it difficult to collect a majority for the party. Jagjivan Ram and Chandra Shekhar came to the conclusion that members from the Janata-S and the Congress, particularly the erstwhile Socialists, could be won over only after something could be done about the RSS-Jan Sangh dual membership issue.

Once that was done, Indira Gandhi took little time to announce her support to Charan Singh. After some preliminary discussions between Charan Singh and Indira Gandhi's representatives, the Cong-I Parliamentary Board announced its unconditional support to him.

The Cong-I announcement made Charan Singh's position firm, though it immediately caused serious rumblings in

the Congress and the CPI-M and the Forward Block, which withdrew their support to Charan Singh suspecting that he might have struck a political deal with Indira. It appeared at one stage that this would threaten Charan Singh's position. But soon it was clear that the solid support of the Congress (with 75 members) and the Congress-I (with 73 members), together with the backing of smaller groups like the CPI and the PWP should be sufficient to give him a definite edge over Morarji Desai, who was all this time embroiled in a serious battle with the two claimants for leadership in the Janata Parliamentary Party—Jagjivan Ram and Chandra Shekhar.

For nearly a week, Jagjivan Ram kept mounting pressures on Morarji Desai from all sides to force him to make way for him as the JPP leader. The Socialists were already with him. He soon won over the Jan Sangh group also on to his side. As Charan Singh kept consolidating his position, everyone in the Janata Party began to veer round the point that only Jagjivan Ram, with his strong pull on Congressmen (apart from some Janata-S men) and the Harijans scattered in different parties). Knowing well how a majority of partymen had come to depend on him, Jagjivan Ram began saying that he could secure support from outside, but only as the leader of the party. He, in fact, told some of the party leaders that he found his manoeuvrability limited because of his "number two" position.

It appeared probable that Jagjivan Ram would be the winner in what he sought after and thus oust Morarji Desai. But Chandra Shekhar entered the fray and changed the situation. Ever since Desai resigned on July 15, Chandra Shekhar went to see RSS chief Balasaheb Deoras in Nagpur and pleaded to

him to find a way out of the mess to save the Janata Party. After intensive negotiations with the RSS leaders, Chandra Shekhar was able to persuade them to promise amendment of the RSS constitution to debar MPs and MLAs from participating in its day-to-day activities. However, the sap did not work. Not a single member from any party could be won over by this desperate gesture, which was characterised by all the parties as a camouflage.

Desai, Jagjivan Ram and Chandra Shekhar made last-minute desperate efforts to woo the Akalis and some recalcitrant Congress MPs after the AIADMK had agreed to support the Janata Party but failed in their move. On the last day when they were to submit their list to the President, the Desai-men became so desperate that just to fill the gap they included the names of as many as 20 Congress MPs in their list without even consulting them, all in the hope that angered by their party's association with the Cong-I, they would switch over to their side. Desai and Jagjivan Ram were also hoping to win over Devraj Urs to their side. However, all their hopes were dashed to ground. Even a glance at their list shows that many of the Janata Party claims were hollow. Once Charan Singh was found to have gathered a larger number of MPs, President N. Sanjiva Reddy took little time to decide his next step. At 5.35 p.m. on Thursday, Charan Singh was handed over the letter of appointment.

Link, July 29, 1979

The Chaudhry in South Block

When 77 year old Charan Singh walked into the regal officers in South Block it was not merely a change of individuals. He wore the same *khadi* as his predecessors. What was different was that these ornate offices were never designed for a "poor

peasant". In what has been a rapid change in the qualitative aspects of Indian polity, the peasant had become king.

He was a little known peasant leader from Uttar Pradesh who walked into the Home Minister's office as the new incumbent in the aftermath of the historic Janata victory in 1977. Yet for almost a decade before that, he had already moved into the inner periphery of national politics. Since the beginning of the seventies, Mrs Indira Gandhi, then the unquestioned leader of the nation, had made overtures (sometime obliquely and other times directly) to this ageing peasant chief.

According to his close confidantes, to he had twice refused to join her. The fact that he is closely susceptible to the handling of his ego and his pride, comes through even in these discussions. At least part of the blame is squarely placed on the emissaries sent by Mrs Gandhi — invariably men who had been his opponents and who were thus able to offend him "unknowingly".

Fortunately for him, Charan Singh had by then already worked out the caste and class magic that was to make him the most powerful — mass base-wise — member of the popular Janata ministry. Gradually over the years he had built his constituency. Unlike the present day belief, it did not consist — at least initially — of the community to which he belonged — the Jats. His most loyal supporters were the Yadavs, and other middle class peasants of eastern Uttar Pradesh. In later years, he was able to consolidate his hold on a large cross section of the rural population with his projected rural bias, his profoundly rural attitude and his pronounced rural mannerisms.

That he had managed to hit upon some latent longing, some powerful under-current

of resentment within rural India was evident even during the hectic campaigning for the March '77 general elections. His public meetings were described by some irreverent onlookers as "the most boring, yet the most avidly listened to". It was the ancient Charan Singh style, lecturing to the masses much as a teacher pained at the ignorance of his students, but now it was fulfilling a deep need somewhere in the gutroote of the Indian countryside. He seemed to them, like one of them talking of their basic needs and telling them as they understood it.

This then is the first time that a member of that forgotten India, the 80 per cent who live in the villages, has ascended the "mighty" Indian throne. The problem that arises for the Chaudhry, and for the dubiously happy votaries of the 80 per cent, is what now?

Charan Singh, aged and ailing, still winces in off-guard moments when he

recollects the past few weeks that brought him to where he is today. According to him, he had no hand in what happened, "Did any one of you think things would take such a turn one month back? I certainly did not," asserts a source particularly close to the present Prime Minister. According to him, the Chaudhry was most reluctant to break the Janata Party. "Chaudhury Sahib diassociated himself from Raj Narain's statement and initially disapproved of his leaving the party. Yes, even he knew that it was but a matter of time before they would all get pushed out of it," he added.

Having come out of the party, his name shattered, Charan Singh has managed to wrest power from his opponents for the time being. How long can he hang on to it, no one knows—not even he himself.

Morning Echo (Magazine) August 5, 1979

9

THE ORDEAL

CHAUDHURY Charan Singh showed in his first month of power that he was nobody's fool. The pressures on his Government were considerable. Only a few days after he took over, Mrs. Gandhi threatened to withdraw the crucial support of her Party if the new Government did not play ball. At the same time, Babu Jagjivan Ram stepped up his 'Operation Topple' sparing neither money nor effort to bring down the new Prime Minister. And in Chaudhury's own hotch-potch coalition Government there were signs of considerable tension, particularly in the other ruling Party, the Congress (S), many of whose members were quite vocal in their disapproval of the choice of Ministers. All these pressures were of course accentuated by the Damocles' sword of the impending confidence vote motion on August 20.

The first and most pressing problem

the new Government had to deal with was to counter Mrs. Gandhi's browbeating tactics. The appointment of Justice H. R. Khanna as Law Minister as well as the inclusion of T. A. Pai, C. Subramaniam and Dr. Karan Singh in the list of Ministers was an open signal from the Chaudhury that he was not going to be cowed down by Mrs. Gandhi. The temporary confusion created by Justice Khanna's resignation just two days after he had taken the oath was quickly rectified by the new Government. S. N. Kacker, an equally bitter critic of Mrs. Gandhi, succeeded him, and in one of his first statements made it clear that there was no question of soft-peddling on the Special Courts issue. This was in keeping with the general strategy laid down by the policy panel formed by Raj Narain a few days after the new Government took over. The panel, headed by Raj Narain and comprising Prime Minister Charan

Singh, S. N. Mishra, R. K. Amin and Sushil Dhara, had emphasised that no compromises would be made.

The Chaudhury Government also showed considerable political maturity in not unduly panicking at the Indira Congress support to the Janata Party in Bihar. In fact, Raj Narain went as far as to predict a "vertical split" in the Indira Congress if it continued to support RSS-dominated Parties. The Janata (S) evidently believed that Mrs. Gandhi could not right now afford to vote against the Charan Singh Government and the aggressive postures struck by her were essentially part of psychological warfare. Their belief was, as events proved, unwarranted.

On August 4, Chaudhury Charan Singh announced that he would seek a confidence vote on the 20th of the month and on the very next day he declared that he would quit if he lost the vote. This declaration followed assurances by both the AIADMK as well as the Akali groups that they would support him in the confidence vote. This increased the Chaudhury's strength in Parliament by 25 and growing hopes of the CPI (M)-led Left Front also supporting him, put him in a better position than where he had been when he came to power. Encouraged at this consolidation of the new Government's strength in Parliament, the Chaudhury camp started drawing up plans for important policy decisions. Among these were the restoration of the minority character of the Aligarh Muslim University, upgrading of the status of Urdu and provision of adequate facilities for Haj pilgrims. All these were to restore the confidence among the Muslim population of the country. The exact timing of the announcement of these decisions was however a matter of debate in the Chaudhry camp and while 'Netaji' Raj

Narain was very keen that these should be made before the confidence vote, the majority opinion in the Janata (S) as well as the Congress (S) was that it should be postponed to after August 20, the new Government also made it clear that while it would continue to fight it, the RSS would not be banned. Plans were also made to abandon the adult education scheme which the RSS had cornered during Janata rule and through which had allegedly misused large amounts of funds.

By the end of the first week of August, it became increasingly clear that neither Babuji's nor Mrs. Gandhi's tactics had succeeded in throwing the new Government completely out of gear. Mrs. Gandhi herself admitted in a public rally on August 9 that she would not "take any hasty action to pull down the Government". "We will move step by step. Our first step was completed with the fall of the Janata Government, now we will wait and see. We would not step into a weak plank," Mrs. Gandhi said. Later, of course, she chose the option of a midterm poll, rather than temporary support to the Chaudhury.

On the policy front, the new Government was understandably hesitant, but it took its first major decision on 13 August when it decided to withdraw the Reserve Bank Ordinance and allow the CDS ordinance to lapse. Just a month back, the Morarji Government had by an ordinance withheld the repayment of this year's instalment under the Compulsory Deposit Scheme on the plea of curbing inflation. Another ordinance had also been passed by the previous Government banning strikes and go-slow tactics by Reserve Bank employees. The withdrawal of these ordinances won the new Government considerable support among the working class and went some way in clearing doubts

among them of the 'kulak' and 'anti-worker' image of the new Prime Minister. It also paved the way for support from the CPM, who now had little reason not to support the Chaudhry.

On the administrative front, the Government made a few important appointments... Central Board of Direct Taxes member O.V. Kuruvilla, from whom the key charge of investigations was taken away last year by the Morarji Government after he unearthed certain income-tax files of Kanti Desai which were given up for "lost", was brought back. There was also a proposal to promote S.N. Sastry, director of inspection, a promotion which was held up for months by the previous Government because of Sastry's role in the Balasubramaniam episode. Another appointment by the new Government was of the former secretary to the Shah Commission, C.R. Rajgopal, who was humiliated by the Morarji Government, as director of the Central Reserve Force. The previous director R.C. Gopal who because of his connections with the ruling caucus of the Janata managed to cling on to his post in spite of his inept handling of the CRP revolt, was given short shrift. A bureaucrat who was removed by the Charan Singh Government was V.V. Nagerkar, additional inspector general, Maharashtra, who was close to Morarji. A list of bureaucrats to be brought back as well as another of those to be removed was drawn up. These decisions were to be implemented after the 20 August confidence vote if Chaudhry survived. Among the most significant of the coming transfers was the move to replace Foreign Secretary Jagat Mehta with Ram Sathe, the present Indian ambassador to Peking. Chaudhry Charan Singh was furious with Jagat Mehta for making such a fool of External Affairs Minister S.N. Mishra at Lusaka.

The growing confidence of the Chaudhry was evident in his Independence Day speech. While no major policy decisions were enunciated, the tenor of Charan Singh's speech was a far cry from the weak and fumbling broadcast to the nation that he made just after becoming Prime Minister. The Chaudhry's sabre-rattling point about reconsidering India's nuclear options if Pakistan made a bomb went down exceedingly well with the crowds and quite a few were heard saying, "Now we have a Jat as a Prime Minister, and he means business". Another point which the Chaudhry did well to stress was the necessity to protect the harijans and landless and poor farmers. This, added to Raj Narain's instructions to the Kanjhawala farmers to call off their agitation against the harijans, helped Chaudhry's image.

The decision to increase fuel and petroleum product prices next day did antagonise certain sections against the new Government but the unpopular decision, which could have been easily postponed till after 20 August, also indicated that Chaudhry Charan Singh was getting surer of himself as the days went by. In the end, all this proved of no avail. And on Monday, August 20, 24 days after being sworn in, Chaudhry Charan Singh resigned.

August 20

It was around 9.30 in the morning on August 20 when the phone rang at 12, Tughlak Road—Chaudhry Charan Singh's residence. It was the 24th day of his Prime Ministership. Less than a month ago the phone had rung with the good news that he was being invited to become Prime Minister. Today the phone call spelled bad news. It was Biju Patnaik on the line : he gave the news of Mrs Gandhi's decision to go

against the Government in the confidence vote.

The news, bad as it was, came as no surprise to the Chaudhury. By Saturday it had become clear that Mrs Gandhi and, to an even greater extent, Sanjay Gandhi had become suspicious of supporting Charan Singh. In his meeting with Raj Narain, Sanjay Gandhi had made it clear that he was not at all pleased with the way the new Government was treating his mother and her Party. "Netaji" Raj Narain talked about the danger of communalism, but Sanjay was not very receptive. Raj Narain came out of the meeting grim-faced. The mood in the Indira Congress also seemed strongly set against the Chaudhury with a general consensus that unless the new Government made a conciliatory gesture to Mrs Gandhi there was no point in her guaranteeing its survival. The recent decision taken by the CPI(M) to support Charan Singh and the inclusion of the AIADMK Ministers in the Chaudhury Government also contributed to considerable nervousness in the Mrs Gandhi camp. "It was increasingly clear from the Government's actions and gestures that Mrs Gandhi was the target, not a friend who helped him to become Prime Minister", said an Indira Congress MP. What Mrs Gandhi feared was that if she let the Chaudhury survive, the situation might get out of her control.

Charan Singh himself, meanwhile, was getting more and more inflexible about making any compromises regarding Mrs Gandhi, however tactical they might be. Biju Patnaik and H.N. Bahuguna spent almost the whole of Sunday evening and night with the Chaudhury trying to persuade him about the tactical gains of a gesture towards Mrs Gandhi. Even Raj Narain was in favour of buying some more

time and winning the confidence vote. But the Jat was adamant. He wasn't even ready to make a phone call to Mrs Gandhi. The taste of Prime Ministership had made him even more certain about his intentions than ever before.

The phone call in the morning from Biju Patnaik came after a last-ditch attempt by him through an emissary to win Mrs Gandhi's support or at least keep her neutral, failed. While Bahuguna and S.N. Mishra, both of whom were with the Chaudhury when the phone call came through, looked depressed, Chaudhury seemed fairly composed and started drafting his resignation letter. An emergency Cabinet meeting was called at 10 a.m. on Monday, where a resolution was passed authorising Charan Singh to submit the resignation of his Council of Ministers and asking the President to declare a mid-term poll. The Cabinet members who attended, with the sole exception of the Chaudhury, all looked equally glum but there was no vocal dissent.

Then the Prime Minister, who had served in office for just 24 days, drove to Rashtrapati Bhavan and shortly after 10.30 a.m. handed in his resignation letter, putting the ball back in the President's court after 26 days. The meeting with the President lasted less than 10 minutes and from Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Chaudhury drove straight to his residence and not to Parliament.

In Parliament, the scene was chaotic. All the galleries were jampacked and the attendance in the House was nearly complete with a few important exceptions like Madhu Limaye, George Fernandes and Biju Patnaik. The note of expectancy in the halls and galleries of Parliament was soon dispelled after the Speaker announced

that Charan Singh had resigned. Janata MPs jumped out of their seats and hugged each other and after finishing congratulating themselves, turned to shake hands with the Indira Congress MPs. Kanwar Lal Gupta was seen giving an enthusiastic hug to C.M. Stephen while many Janata and Congress (I) MPs cheered deliriously.

The Janata (S) and Congress (S) MPs, on the other hand, seemed sullen as they weakly returned the showers of abuse and jeers which were pouring on them from the Indira Congress and Janata benches. Even Netaji seemed distinctly off-colour and was seen quietly accepting the jeers. Members of the AIADMK were even more embarrassed. Bala Pijnore, the AIADMK MP who was sworn in as a Minister just the day before, was seen trying to say something, but repeated uproars as soon as he got up to speak finally compelled him to sit down. Ultimately, the morning's Parliament fiasco was ended when, on the advice of Babu Jagjivan Ram, the Speaker decided to adjourn the House till 2 p.m.

Members however continued to mill around in the Central Hall and Jagjivan Ram was seen talking to a large group of MPs who crowded around him. Some of them belonged to the Congress (S) and there was a hot rumour gaining ground that as many as 25 Congress (S) MPs were going to support Babuji if the President asked him to form a Government. Bahuguna strode in and stood at the Central Hall doorway with his hands on his hips, surveying the scene for some time. He caught Babuji's eye suddenly, hurriedly did a *namaste* and turned to talk to some other people. Mrs Gandhi came after a while and immediately a part of the crowd surrounding Babuji moved towards her and within no time she had a good 100 MPs surrounding her. There was also a strong rumour in the capital that if there were

defections from the Congress (S) they would be to Mrs Gandhi and not Babuji.

Just before the House was meeting at 2 p.m. there was high drama right outside the main gate of Parliament. Mrs Gandhi was coming out when she was confronted by about 30 Janata (S) MPs led by Maniram Bagri shouting, "Indira Gandhi *murdabad*". Kalpanath Rai who was with Mrs Gandhi started shouting in his characteristic style, "*chup karo, jane do*". Following his example, Mrs Gandhi's bodyguard Bhim also started shouting at the MPs.

Inside the House, Charan Singh made his entry at exactly 2 p.m. The business of the House was over in less than a minute after the Speaker adjourned the House *sine die*.

In the evening, Raj Narain, looking far more cheerful, told a crowded news conference that the events of the day "were a victory and not defeat" for Charan Singh. "The President is bound to call mid-term polls" he asserts. Heckled often childishly by virulently anti-Chaudhury journalists — and there were many in the Press conference — Netaji parried questions cleverly and came out with some typical Raj Narain gems like "Now we are seeing a marriage between devi (Indira) and Deoras", and "Babuji is not CFD, he is RSS". S. N. Mishra made a brief appearance and said that the resignation of Charan Singh proved that he was the only clean and democratic Prime Minister the country had for some time. Most Press correspondents however left before Raj Narain started talking about the real reason for the Press conference — a briefing on various defence deals undertaken by the Morarji Government. Netaji also threatened to produce the controversial Balasubramaniam the next day at a Press conference.

Sunday Weekly August 26, 1979

10

THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA

MR Charan Singh (rather Mr Raj Narain) has won. After a scrutiny of the claims submitted by him and Mr Morarji Desai, the caretaker Prime Minister since July 15, Mr Charan Singh has been invited by President Sanjiva Reddy to form the new government at the Centre. The oath taking ceremony is likely to take place tomorrow. This brings to a close another important chapter in the short post-independence history of democracy in this country.

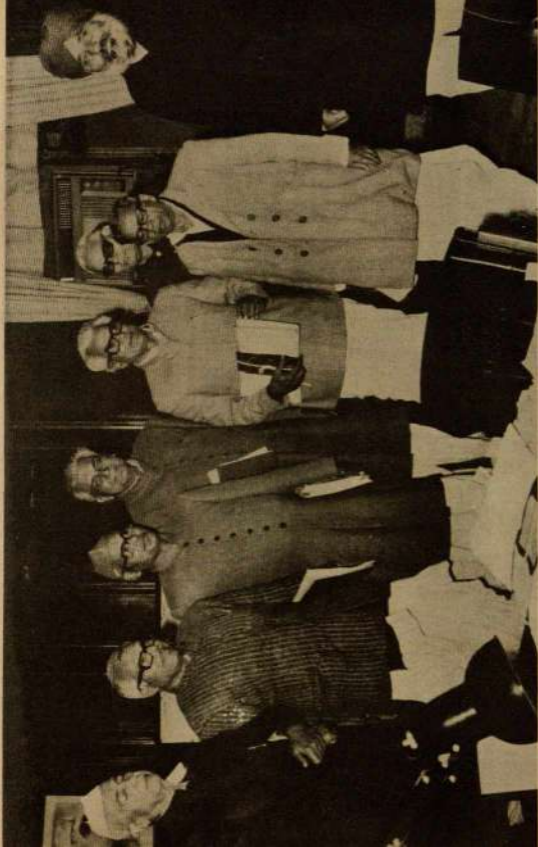
The new Prime Minister will head a coalition government, as his supporters are a conglomeration of a number of parties and groups in Lok Sabha—his own breakaway group from the Janata Party which has been styled as Janata (Secular), the Congress party headed by Sardar Swaran Singh, the Congress led by the former Prime Minister, Mrs Indira

Gandhi, the factions led by Mr H. N. Bahuguna, Mr Biju Patnaik, Mr George Fernandes and Mr Madhu Limaye, the Communist Party of India, the Peasants and Workers Party and the Muslim League. The Akali Dal, which had remained neutral in the race for prime ministership between Mr Charan Singh and Mr Desai (who continues to lead the Janata Party—the largest one—in Lok Sabha) is expected to join hands with the winner. The CPI(M), the Forward Bloc, the Republican Party of India and the National Conference too remained neutral in this power struggle. They are likely to lend indirect support to Mr Charan Singh for they may not like to topple him soon.

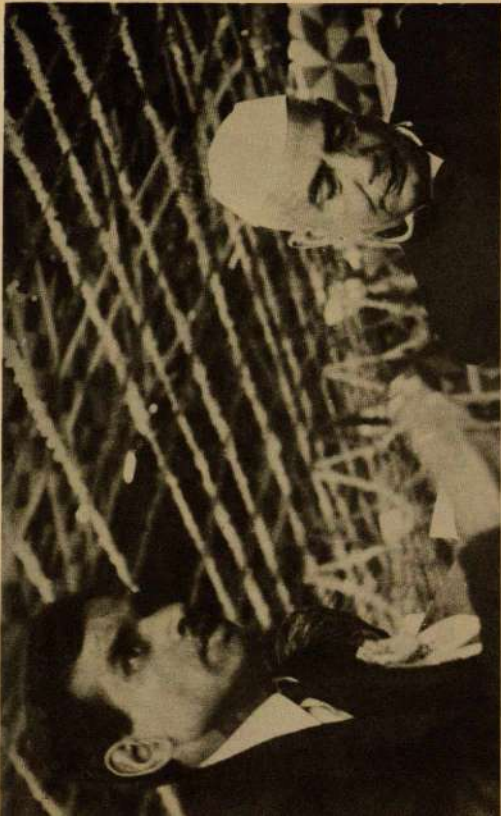
The AIADMK has announced that it will judge the performance of the new ministry, particularly in regard to the language issue, the state autonomy and



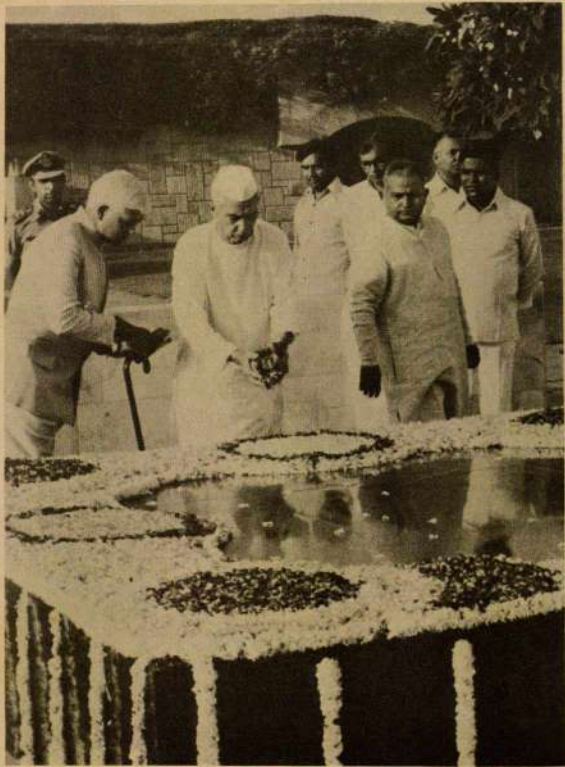
Chaudhry Charan Singh taking oath of office as Union Home Minister in New Delhi in March 1977.



The then Deputy Prime Minister Chaudhry Charan Singh is seen here with the Chief Ministers of Haryana, Punjab, Bihar, Rajasthan and Orissa in New Delhi on February 5, 1976.



Mr. Rameshvar Hooda Secretary Reception Committee is seen receiving BKD Chairman Chaudhry Charan Singh at the BKD annual session held at Rohtak on January 3, 1971.



Prime Minister Mr. Charan Singh at Mahatma Gandhi's Samadhi before he unfurled the National flag at the Red Fort on the Independence Day.

devolution of funds from the centre to the states. It is opposed to dethroning Mr Charan Singh, even though in the power struggle it had sided with the Janata Party whose other supporters for making Mr Desai again the Prime Minister included the United Parliamentary Forum, some independents and 21 members who were expected to leave the Congress-S. The Congress-S remained united, notwithstanding the fact that several of its members had asked the leader of this party, Mr Y. B. Chavan, (who was also the leader of the Opposition) not to include their names among the supporters of Mr Charan Singh. The unsubstantiated claim for Mr Desai about these members went against him.

It is, indeed, ironical that Mr Charan Singh has to depend on the Congress-I support, even though it is to be from outside, for remaining in power. He was one of the founders of the Janata Party which was formed in early 1977 to dethrone Mrs Gandhi who, he had till lately proclaimed, represented the dictatorial tendencies in the country. In its fight against the Jan Sangh, which is denigrated as a communal organisation, the Janata-S has preferred even the Congress-I support apparently considering that dictatorial tendencies are less harmful to the country! As argued in this journal last week, the fight against the Jan Sangh was just a facade for the power struggle.

It remains to be seen whether the new government will be able to carry on till the next election to Lok Sabha in 1982. Much depends on how the different constituents of the new coalition, whether they participate in the ministry-making or continue to lend support from outside, behave. Mr Charan Singh has denied that the support to him from his collaborators

is conditional in any way. But he is yet to announce his policy on such crucial issues as the recent ordinances on the CDS and the Reserve Bank employees' agitation, the grant of bonus to railwaymen, and the cases against Mrs Gandhi and her collaborators during the emergency (some of them have already been referred to special courts). As Deputy Prime Minister (Finance) in Mr Desai's government till July 15—he resigned from the Janata Party the next day to head the Janata-S—he was directly concerned with the issuance of the above two ordinances and was stoutly opposed to the bonus for railwaymen. He was also a party to the decisions of the previous government on the emergency cases. Any soft-pedalling of these issues apparently will be indicative of the fact that some commitments were made by him before he received support from his collaborators. Mr Charan Singh is also said to have finalised an eleven-point programme on the basis of which the coalition government is to be run. This programme included laying of special stress on rural development and rural industrialization, equal importance to heavy and other industries without injuring the small-scale sector, allowing the public sector to play the key role in the economy, keeping the nuclear option open, introduction of prohibition through education and persuasion, and not forcing Hindi on the southern states. The foreign policy is to be continued on non-aligned basis as in the past.

Eastern Economist

Charan Singh Invited

Raj Narain's house in New Delhi was unusually deserted on Thursday afternoon. A few cars stood in the driveway: There were more cars than people. Around 3.30 p.m. a telephone call came from the Rashtrapati Bhavan to Mr. Raj Narain's

had accepted, in principle, Mr. Charan Singh's right to form the new Government. house informing "Netaji" that the President Mr. Raj Narain heard the news calmly, then told his personal aides that he was going to sleep. His work, he said was done. He did not even telephone Chaudhury Charan Singh.

A telephone call had also gone to the Chaudhury's house, but he had been requested not to tell anyone. At 4 p.m. the permanent crowd outside his house was still quiet and apprehensive. Mr. K.C. Tyagi, a young leader of the Chaudhury camp, had heard the news at Raj Narain's house. He walked out of a friend's car and first broke the news to the crowd outside. When he entered the Chaudhury's house it was silent. Mr. Kartar Singh, on the Chaudhury's personal staff for 20 years, and perhaps his closest aide, was smiling but still maintained the official silence.

Chaudhury Charan Singh was sitting alone in his small room when we entered, the first outsiders to meet him after he became the Prime Minister designate. He looked happy, a small smile on his lips. On the wall above him was a large framed blow-up of the Chaudhury addressing the kisan rally last December. On the wall on the left side was a large blow-up of Gandhiji, on the right wall was on equally large portrait of Swami Dayanand. A picture of Sardar Patel also decorated the room.

The Chaudhury accepted our congratulations with a smile. He asked his aide to put a call through to Mr. Raj Narain. We told him that Mr. Raj Narain had gone to sleep after hearing the news, saying that his work was now done. Mr. Tyagi then suggested that he should only meet the people who had shown him

the affection and given him the support that made him Prime Minister: the villagers. He agreed.

Then he told his aide to phone the various leaders. So far not a single phone call had come from anyone congratulating him. The news had still not spread. Among the people who first came to the Chaudhury's mind, among those who needed to be called, were Mr. Raj Narain, Mr. H.N. Bahuguna, Mr. Devaraj Urs, Mr. Y.B. Chavan, Mr. Chandrajit Yadav, Mr. Madhu Limaye, Mr. K.C. Pant, Mr. George Fernandes, Mr. S.N. Mishra, Mr. R.K. Amin, Mr. Janeshwar Mishra, Mr. Rabi Ray and Mr. Unnikrishan. Very high on his list were Mr. Urs and Mr. Chandrajit Yadav, "This boy has done a lot of work," he said about Mr. Yadav. Of course more names were soon added to the list.

The first phone call was to Mr. Chavan. The Chaudhury thanked him, and said that his Prime Ministership was their victory. "All of you have helped a great deal," he said and then added that they should "decide the names" very quickly as he wanted to form a Ministry as soon as possible. "Public work has been held up for too long," said the Prime Minister designate.

The second phone-call was for Mr. Urs. "Devarajji," said the Chaudhury, "This is your victory." They spoke for quite a while.

At 4.30 p.m. the Chaudhury got up and said that he must meet the ordinary people, they were the real people to be thanked, they deserved all that he could give. Still barefoot, he walked out of the room, through a corridor and the main drawing room, and into the hall which led to the door. As we entered the hall, the

rush of the crowd outside had almost forced open the door and the security people were having a very hard time keeping them back. They wanted to see their leader. "A poor man has become the Prime Minister," they said. "He is the first poor man to become a Prime Minister."

Suddenly on the way the Chaudhury realised that he was not wearing shoes. He darted into a side room and quickly put on his shoes and came back. As he went outside the frenzy reached its climax. They mobbed him, nearly lifted him high, and the crush from all sides was so great that, considering the age, only a politician could have withstood it. But now the place was swarming with freshly commandeered policemen and plain-clothesmen, and they were quickly guarding the Prime Minister to be. He spoke for a minute softly. Then he went back.

The first hour of another era was over.

Chaudhury himself was beaming but seemed a little subdued. As newsmen crowded around him and asked him questions, Charan Singh answered in monosyllables, and his face had a deadpan look. The only time he showed some emotion was when a woman photographer, Mandira Purie, was pushed down on the ground in the rush of photographers looking for a vantage point from which to take pictures of the Prime Minister-designate. "You will be crushed in this crowd, come with me into another room and you can take your photographs," he told Purie.

At exactly 5.30 p.m. the Prime Minister designate entered the gates of Rashtrapati Bhavan in a white Ambassador car. He was ushered in to the President's study room where Mr. Reddy was awaiting him and he was then taken to the morning room where he was handed over the letter inviting him

formally to form a Government. The meeting between Mr. Reddy and Charan Singh was short and to the point. According to the President's secretary Hamid, there was little conversation. In a little while, the Chaudhury came out flanked by security men and got into the waiting Ambassador car after giving a one-line answer to a question by a reporter about when he would form a Government. "May be tomorrow or Saturday, after our Congress friends decide", were the only words that Charan Singh spoke. Meanwhile there was gloom and despair in the Janata camp. The ones who had jeered the most loudly when on July 9, Raj Narain came into Parliament and sat in the Opposition benches were sullen and quiet.

Morarji had been informed of the President's decision by a letter shortly after 4 p.m. that day. When reporters reached his residence it wore an absolutely deserted look. A few security men tried to stop the newsmen but when prevailed upon, they agreed to phone up Mr. Desai's securities. "What's the use? We will be on duty at Chaudhury Sahab's place soon," one of the security men said. Dressed in crisp white, Morarji had an air of resignation when he came to meet the Press. Accompanying him were Ravindra Varma and Bhajan Lal. Conscious of his characteristic terse answers, a reporter asked hesitantly whether Morarji would give his reactions to the day's political developments. "I have said 'no' all too often. Now I will not say no," was Morarji's surprising answer. He answered all the questions with his usual composure but the snap had gone out of the 84-year-old ex-Prime Minister who fulfilled his life's ambition after March 1977, only to be rudely deprived of it 28 months later by someone whose life's ambition was as great as his.

FACE TO FACE WITH CHARAN SINGH

Q: *How did you feel first when you became Prime Minister, and how did you feel when you resigned? I ask for your personal reactions.*

A: It made no difference to me. I am used to being in the wilderness. I derive my sustenance in public life from the affections of the people, not from office.

Q: *But the main charge that your detractors, particularly your former colleagues in the Janata, are making against you is that you left the Party in order to fulfil your personal ambitions, and they have called you a defector. Are you a defector?*

A: Firstly, it is not a defection. According to the report of the committee (set up to study the subject and prevent defections), when more than 20 per cent

of the legislators leave a Party it does not amount to a defection, it amounts to a split. So far as my ambitions are concerned, I think every man in public life should entertain an ambition of holding office and if possible the highest office with a view to serving the people according to his principles. Office is an instrument of service. Office amounts to power only in the hands of those who would abuse it. In the hands of those who would make good use of it, impartially, it is a burden. So it is not the lure of office that forced me to leave. The truth is different.

They had decided—my friends, the Jana Sangh leadership, the Prime Minister and the Janata Party chairman...to oust me and my colleagues from the Government and also to exclude us from positions in the organisation as well. They decided this a long while ago, and for more than a year

and a half went about trying to do so. There are many examples. For instance, the central election panel which the Janata chairman set up consisted only of three persons : Mr Surendra Mohan, who will not get elected from his town even in a municipal poll...it is I who got him elected to the Rajya Sabha from UP; it is on the basis of my votes that he came. There is another man who is known as Ram Krishna Hegde, whose reputation is dismal. The third person was Sunder Singh Bhandari of the Jana Sangh. Why did they forget the BLD altogether? It was the BLD who brought them into existence. This was not enough. There were six members of the Rajasthan panel. Not one from BLD was there. Why? There were six persons in the Gujarat panel. Not one person from the BLD was included. There were six in UP : two belonging to the C. B. Gupta group, and only one to us. Why? Does C. B. Gupta and the Congress (O) enjoy twice the influence that we have in UP? And if he did, why didn't the chairman of the Party, Mr Chandrashekhar, ask Mr Gupta to canvass for votes in the Fatehpur byelection? Had Mr Gupta gone there, we would have definitely lost that seat. In the preceding Assembly elections, Mr Gupta had lost his security deposit. And out of the 425 seats, the Congress (O) won only ten. Despite hectic canvassing by Shri Morarji Desai. And now he says that he will be going out to canvass for his Party, the Janata (C) : I will welcome it, it will only stand us in good stead. In the last Assembly polls before 1977 that is in 1974, we had 106 seats, 61 seats went to Jana Sangh, 10 to Congress (O), five to Socialists. These last three Parties got four seats in Mr Chandrashekhar's election panel for UP, and the Party which had won 106 seats got only one. What does this mean? They wanted to exclude us from any place in the organisation.

As regards the Government. Well, the only offence I had committed for which I was asked to resign last year was that I had asked whether my colleagues were a pack of impotent people. That was because Mrs Gandhi was going about saying that these people can't arrest me. When I said that the Government consisted of impotent people I included myself in it. 'Impotent' means simply weak-kneed people, nothing more than that. On June 16 the Cabinet Secretary and the Home Secretary had seen me at Surajkhand where I was convalescing about how we should proceed in the matter of prosecutions against Indira Gandhi consequent on the report of the Shah Commission, and whether some special procedure should be devised. I am not a criminal lawyer. Later on a gentleman told me that there is Section 407 or 507 which provides for special procedure : by which from the sessions court the case can go directly up to the Supreme Court. I don't think any opinion of the Supreme Court was necessary in this regard, which the Government decided to seek. The law, as it stands, already provides for this. But I have never been a criminal lawyer; and I did not know. I simply asked the Cabinet Secretary and the Home Secretary to devise some special procedures. Otherwise, if we resorted to the ordinary process it would take ten years. On June 9 Mr Ram Jethmalani had written a letter to the Law Minister saying that he had seen me twice at Surajkhand and my opinion was that some ordinance should be issued, some special procedure should be adopted. I quoted this letter in the statement which I made on the floor of Parliament on December 22 explaining why I resigned.

On June 17 our Prime Minister returned from the USA, and at the Press conference he said that the Government would devise no special procedures and that

the cases would be resolved by ordinary law. On June 21 he repeated the same thing. I think Acharya Kripalani had already issued a statement by then that Morarji Desai should resort to Special Courts, and that he had learnt that Morarji Desai had agreed not to persecute or prosecute Indira Gandhi, that he was very soft with her. I quoted this too in my statement to Parliament. But for saying all this against Mrs Gandhi I was asked to resign. This is the way they treated me.

Now, about Raj Narain. The accusation against him was that he addressed a meeting at the Ridge in Simla sometime around the beginning of June (in 1978). Fifteen days earlier Atal Behari Vajpayee had addressed a similar meeting at that very place. The explanation to defend Mr Vajpayee was that it was a Government function. But wherever a Minister goes it becomes a Government function. Moreover, the account books of the Janata Party of Simla show that the expenses of holding that meeting were borne by the Party. Further, meetings at that place had been held several times before by various leaders. Then, there was no Section 144 in that area, as alleged. There was another charge against Raj Narain that he had criticised the Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister at that meeting. No! It was a totally false accusation. His speech had been taperecorded. But it was the State Chief Minister, a Jana Sangh leader, an RSS man, who wrote to Morarji as desired by Nanaji Deshmukh, and because of this Raj Narain was asked to resign. Can any example be quoted to show that on such a flimsy charge a Prime Minister should ask his colleague to resign?

They wanted to destroy us. I had received a letter from Bombay on February 28, 1978 from a friend that I would be

asked to resign: The Jana Sangh and Morarji had ganged up. They proposed to oust me from the Ministry, or at least to take away the Home department from me. There were two reasons for this. The first was the largely attended kisan rally on December 23, 1977. That put a fright into them. They felt jealous. They felt they were nowhere compared to this man. And then—my folly, you might say, my audacity, you might say, in asking the Prime Minister to set up an enquiry committee which he had promised, into the allegations against his own son. This promise he had made at a public meeting which he addressed on January 15 at Bhavnagar, presided over by the president of the district Janata Party. Look up *The Times of India* of January 16: you will find the details there.

So I had committed two 'mistakes': proved to be too popular for them, and had the audacity to ask Morarji Desai to stick to his word. This was how we were treated in the first half of 1978. Then they were not prepared to take back Raj Narainji. The reason given was that he was very wild in his speeches against the Prime Minister. To some extent their allegation was correct. I had advised Raj Narain to put a bridle on his tongue, not to speak unrestrained language. But when an audience was in front of him he could not restrain himself. On three occasions I publicly disowned him. Further, you will find that when disciplinary action was taken against him, I didn't condemn the disciplinary action.

The action against Raj Narain was taken not because he had committed any wrong, but because he was Raj Narain, because he was leader of the BLD, because he was my closest colleague. If they were lovers of discipline in the Party why did they not take any action against the MLAs of the Jana Sangh and the Chandrashekhar group when they voted openly on a money

bill on the floor of the House against their own Government in UP? Not only that. Last year, when candidates to the Rajya Sabha were elected from the Bihar Assembly and the Rajasthan Assembly, money was used by the Chandrashekhar group to defeat the Janata candidate Shyam Lal Gupta. Similarly a lady, our candidate, was defeated in Rajasthan by the Jana Sangh members of the Assembly. The matter came up before the Parliamentary Board. Atal Behari Vajpayee was appointed to look into it. There was no report made. When I asked for a report I got silence. Not only that Chandrashekhar, Ram Krishna Hegde and others had been fostering indiscipline in Haryana all along. They never took any action against the dissidents there. And when Devi Lal and Mrs Chandravati took any action, it was revoked. If anyone was suspended, the suspension was lifted by Delhi.

Now take the case of UP. Yesterday (that is, on August 23) Girilal Jain has written an article in *The Times of India* on the fall of Charan Singh. There he says the trouble began in UP when Ram Naresh Yadav turned out Jana Sangh Ministers. Now, this is a lie. He first turned out two of his own Ministers on grounds of misconduct, and then two junior Ministers of the Jana Sangh. The trouble did not begin there. The trouble began on December 23, 1977 when the seeds of jealousy and fright were implanted in the hearts of these people. Take the case of Patna. You could not find a finer public man than him (Karpooori Thakur), though I wish he was a stricter administrator. He had tremendous support among the people: you see how we will win in Bihar.

To return to UP, after Ram Naresh, a man of integrity, had turned out the Ministers he was asked to seek a vote of confidence. When the matter came up I

asked why. Let those people who are dissatisfied put a vote of no confidence against Ram Naresh Yadav: Why should he seek a vote of confidence? He had been made to seek a vote of confidence only six months earlier, and now again. That amounted to demoralising him, demoralising the administration: this should not have been done. But Morarji would not listen. Similarly about Patna. I said let those against Karpooori Thakur bring a vote of no confidence. Ram Naresh was removed, Karpooori Thakur was removed, and now remained Haryana. The dissidents were invited, or summoned, by the Ministers here in Delhi and they gathered at the residence of the Prime Minister himself on June 6. And this man, the Prime Minister, exhorted them to be firm, to remain united in ousting Devi Lal. Now, if Morarji wanted the Party to continue to function well, was it not his duty, if there was anything wrong with the Haryana Government, just to ask me to look into it? Was he a dictator? It was I who raised him to that pedestal. But look at his attitude. And then to send the 30 odd MLAs who gathered at his place to Rajasthan. They were sent away on the evening of the 6th and they returned on the 25th morning, when the vote was on the 26th. Should any Prime Minister behave in this manner?

On the 21st my friends gathered at the residence of R. K. Amin to ponder about what was happening. Everybody was very, very furious. To return to the question of the election panels for a moment. On November 27, 1978, 20 MPs and Ministers from UP wrote a letter to Chandrashekhar protesting against the constitution of the election panel for UP. No response. Two weeks later my friends from Rajasthan wrote a similar letter, and also my friends from Gujarat. No response. They could not care.

In April, (this year) Ram Krishna Hegde gave a misleading briefing to the Press about the meeting of the parliamentary board, that the board had decided that the RSS is a cultural body and no action would be taken about dual membership. Now that was a lie. I can give you a copy of the letter I addressed to the chairman. It was a clear lie, a falsehood. I gave my arguments why dual membership should not be allowed to continue. On 4th or 6th November 1976 Bhanu Pratap Singh had written a letter to Jayaprakash Narayan saying that we have failed to form a Party, but there is one silver lining—we have agreed on a common programme, and also the aims and objectives of the Party. He enclosed the programme with this letter. The letter requested JP to lend a helping hand so that a one-united party might emerge. The programme enclosed with the letter says that there should be no dual membership in the Janata Party: a member of the Janata Party will not join any other political Party or any other Party motivated by political considerations—it is very very clear. I sent a letter to the Party that we must now agree to work as a coalition; no homogeneous Party was likely to emerge. This was in the second week of April, this year. No action was taken. The letter was forwarded to Morarji Desai, but no action. So on June 21, (at the gathering in R.K. Amin's house) I suggested the formation of a committee consisting of two young members of the BLD and two older members under presidentship of R.K. Amin himself to consider ways and means about how we should proceed, to frame a strategy: I did not know what to do. On the 22nd, the next day, while on my way to my house, I went to see Bahuguna who was not feeling well. There I found Raj Narain and Shyam Nandan Mishra also. There Raj Narain asked my permission to leave the Party. Disciplinary action had already been taken

against him on June 12. I said no to him, I said we'll fight within the Party. He again asked me. When he asked me for the third time, I told him if he wanted to leave he should go, but he did not have my initiative. I do not believe in staying in the Government and asking my friend to go out and attack the Government from outside. But with all his faults, the virtues that Raj Narain possesses are far larger, far larger. But on June 26 Morarji Desai tells a newsman who asks him about the resignations, that it doesn't matter, that if all the members of the BLD leave they will do so at their cost or at their peril, and the Government will become stronger still. Could any Prime Minister in his senses use this language? It hurt my colleagues greatly. In a way, it was a challenge to them.

And then came the disclosures that a raid had been made on June 4 on the house of Balasubramaniam; this became known around 7th or 8th June. He had submitted an affidavit in court saying that he had business and political dealings with Kanti Desai for the last two decades, and he used to go to Morarji's house often. So, everything was exposed. I sent to Morarji Desai some documents, and telex messages, which the officers had seized from one place in Delhi and one in Madras (which was raided on the 6th) mentioning the name of Kanti Desai more than once. Morarji Desai replied after a few days that enquiries may be made in the normal course. But can an enquiry be made against the major son of a Prime Minister, the only son, who lives with him and is a political secretary to his father, in the ordinary course? If he could turn out his son from his house, may be it would have been possible. And can an enquiry be made against a Minister while he is still in office? No. (Morarji Desai put that noting on the file) so that if the matter

comes up before Parliament he could say that he had asked Charan Singh to make enquiry in the normal course. That was the intention. As time passed, many revelations were made in this case also. Kanti Desai was earning money on the strength of his relationship with the Prime Minister. If you remember (Morarji Desai) had said on the floor of the House that Kanti had accompanied him on a visit to London in June 1977 in order to finalise the severance of his relations with a business house, and that he no longer carries on any business. But this man says in his affidavit submitted on 11th June that it was Kanti who asked him to enter business again which due to his bad health he had given up, and he would take up that business alone which Kanti had recommended to him. And as I have told you, in the telex message, which can't be forged, there is a mention of Kanti's name: 'Kanti has approved' it says. This referred to a contract which the Government of India had entered into with a Japanese firm, which agreed to give 25 per cent as commission to Balasubramaniam and others. This was in connection with a shipyard in Paradip. A West German firm had also made an offer, but then the Japanese got the contract. The papers will show that some arrangement was made to change the committee which was to evaluate the tenders. The papers are clear on that point. And the committee was changed. So, that was the kind of Prime Minister we had.

And then came this motion of no-confidence by Shri Y. B. Chavan. We never knew that he was going to bring it; we never had any talk with him. All these things: Morarji's statement that it doesn't matter if the BLD members leave, the Balasubramaniam case, the RSS issue came together. Then my friends asked me, Chaudhry Sahab, now leave us free.

We can't submit to this kind of blackmail and to this Government any longer. I myself had not been able to work out any strategy. I was thinking of doing something within the Party after July 28, because the session was to last till August 18. I never designed the split. I was driven to the wall. I and my friends who were more responsible than anybody else for bringing the Janata Party into existence. For raising Morarji himself and Chandra Shekhar to the positions that they occupy. And now they are talking nonsense!

Now about Mrs. Gandhi. I told Kamalapati Tripathi and C.M. Stephen when they came to my house that, look here, for formality's sake you have been offering unconditional support to me, and for formality's sake I am going to admit that you are being very magnanimous. But the hard reality is, I told them in so many words, that you are choosing a lesser evil in the form of a break-up of the Janata Party. That's all. And they laughed. I never made any suggestion: my wife never went to that lady; none of my prominent friends ever saw Shrimati Indira Gandhi. From 11th July onwards you will find half a dozen references in the Press that Indira Gandhi was going to offer unconditional support to those people who were supporting the no-confidence motion. Now Stephen says that Raj Narainji had made a request and it was at his request that his Party had offered unconditional support. No. It is a lie. Raj Narainji simply asked Kamalapati Tripathi that we are reading the papers which say that you are willing to offer us unconditional support, and if that is so then kindly say so to the President. It was after this that the two friends (Tripathi and Stephen) came to my house. And then they said why couldn't they say that Raj Narain had come to their house. After all, Mrs. Gandhi had come to my house, once.

I said yes, on the occasion of the birth of a child. If there is a birth of a child in her house, say Rajiv's child or Sanjay's child and she invites all the people, all the leaders, then I will be too glad to come. And Mrs. Gandhi had seen me once when I was lying ill in the last week of March in the Lohia Hospital. She had come to request me : for God's sake, not to prosecute her or her son, for all that they had done. And then she told me that Atal Behari Vajpayee had assured them about this. I replied that I couldn't do anything about it and she should go and see Morarji Desai. After that, she is a very intelligent lady, and she sent, a bouquet of flowers when I had a heart attack, and then when the kisan rally took place and millions of people were present. But that didn't affect me at all. So they (Tripathi and Stephen) said, why can't you see her. I said, no. Then they said that I should write a letter that we too had sought unconditional support. I said, well, I see no objection in writing such a letter, but I will consult my friends first. I wrote that letter and released it to the Press, and I took care not to say that I was thankful, only that I greatly appreciate your gesture.

Now, the Government was formed. The President told me I had a majority of 24 persons; out of 492, 250 would have wanted me to be the Prime Minister and Morarji's list had only 234 genuine names. Things began to be discussed : what does Mrs. Gandhi want, does she want the Special Courts scrapped—many Congress (I) MPs made statements. I kept quiet. On the night of 19th August, at 9.30 p.m., a friend of mine told me that he understood that Jagjivan Ram had agreed to cancel the notification under which the *Kissa Kursi Ka* case is transferred to the Supreme Court from the sessions court. I was told that if I was prepared to do the same, Mrs. Gandhi

would prefer to support me rather than Jagjivan Ram. I said, no!

A day earlier, Indira's son Sanjay had seen one of my friends and said that instead of being kind to them for their support, all that the Charan Singh Government had done was to accelerate the cases against Mrs Gandhi and him. And he gave five specific instances. My friend came to me. I called for the Law Minister. Kacker told me that this notification had been issued before our Government came into existence, on 19th July. The notification simply said that the offence was one which fell under the Special Courts' jurisdiction. And according to what has been stated in the law, the case stood automatically transferred to the Supreme Court. No special order was needed. In another case the High Court had ordered day to day proceedings; that too was not made at the instance of the Government. Three other points were explained by the Law Minister, who pointed out that the cases had not been speeded up. At the same time we were very firm that we would do nothing to cancel the notification or do anything to show that we are being soft. That is the position.

I had realised that we would lose in Parliament. This was not a vote of no-confidence. This was a vote of confidence which we sought. And we were not bound to seek it. It is the Council of Ministers which advises the President, not the President who advises the Council of Ministers. Just out of respect for the President and regard for democracy I called the legislature for August 20. I could have postponed it for six months and made my position strong. But perhaps I could not have done it even six months later because I would not bribe people (laughs). So, it was clear that we would lose. I consulted the Constitution and it was very specific that the President was bound by the advice

of the Council of Ministers; he had no discretion. Even by the ruling given by the Supreme Court in 1974, even when the conventions were in force. Now it has been written down. When this amendment was moved by Shanti Bhushan, in answer to the question whether a Prime Minister with a minority Government could ask for a dissolution, he said yes. Because it is the people who are sovereign, not Parliament. Look at the case of Callaghan, only a few months ago. He lost on the floor of the House, and he asked for fresh elections, and it was granted. Perhaps there is no case of a defeated Prime Minister who wanted to go to the people and was refused. Take the case of the President himself in 1954 when his Government in Andhra Pradesh lost on the floor of the House; he was the deputy leader, and T. Prakasam was the leader and they asked for a fresh poll and it was granted, despite the protest of the Communists who were in large numbers in the Opposition.

So to say that the President was in league with us, and to use the words of this Chandrashekhar, who will never be returned from his constituency (in Ballia)—I assure you, he will lose his deposit; and if you go to Sikandapur and see the palatial buildings which have come into existence, and the Apeejay Vidyamandir constituted by the money of the infamous industrialist! Why do we give the names of educational institutions after Gandhi or Patel or Dayanand, so that people may get some inspiration from these personalities. So, there the students will get inspiration from Aminchand Pyarelal. And you know who laid the foundation stone? Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, the Jan Sangh leader. And such was the chairman of our Party. It was the misfortune of our Party, that such a man was the Prime Minister and such a man was the chairman of the Party.

Q : Of the people who drove you out of Janata Party, between Chandrashekhar, Morarji Desai and the Jana Sangh—RSS leadership, who was most determined against you ?

A : The Prime Minister. And the Jana Sangh. But really I can't distinguish between them. All of them knew that they do not enjoy the confidence of the people, so they were anxious to buttress their high positions. In me they saw their enemy. So they were out to destroy me. Although I had done nothing wrong. This man of a Prime Minister did not agree to merge his Party into the new Party till January 18, 1977, when he was released. If Morarji Desai had asked for the dissolution of the House, the President could not have refused him. But he could not ask, because he knew that the people would not return him. And now it is only the Janata Party which is opposed to a midterm poll, no other Party. They know they will be defeated.

Q : What are your prospects in the next elections ?

A : In the next elections you will see we will sweep the polls. We will not return simply as the largest, single group; my alliance will sweep the polls. Villagers all over the country, even in States which I have not visited hitherto, for example Tamil Nadu and Kerala, they now also feel there must be a change. There is somebody now who speaks the villagers' language. It is on their strength that I say that I simply need choose good candidates—that's all. Even no organisation will be necessary; the village boys will set up organisations themselves. Nor will I take money from any millionaire.

Q : Even if you ask them they will not give it to you.

A: (Laughs uproariously) no, no, no. Even while some people were trying to do horsetrading during the last few weeks, particularly by some of your friends who are now so vociferous against the President, two persons telephoned my wife. She came and told me that people want to give us money. I asked her, what reply did you give? She said, I refused. I said, good. But we don't need their money.

Q: Who will be your main opponent, the Janata Party or Mrs Gandhi?

A: Everybody who is dishonest (laughs loudly).

Q: Seriously, who will constitute the greater challenge to you?

A: In fact, I think Mrs Gandhi and the Jana Sangh may collude. Outwardly, they may keep up a semblance of hostility, covertly they may join up against our candidates. They will not make an open declaration to this effect. So what shall I say: shall I say the Jana Sangh, or shall I say Indiraji?

Q: You have a reputation for being anti-city...

A: No, no, no, I am not anti-city; I am living in a city myself. I am anti-big city, that's all. Big cities can't be managed well. No city should have a population of more than one million—I am not talking about the metropolitan cities that already exist but of the other cities which are growing, and which are being created. We should have more cities, but smaller ones.

I am not against the urban poor; I am on their side. I am against the urban rich who fleece the country. I have already said in my Red Fort speech that 41 per cent of the urban population lives below the poverty line. I stand for the poor whether

urban or rural. Out of the 48 per cent of our country which lives below the poverty line, a large number live in cities. They build the mansions of the rich, and die on the pavements. If there is more emphasis on the rural, it is only because the vast majority of the poor live there.

Q: Are you going to hold enquiry commissions into Kanti Desai and Suresh Ram?

A: If public interest so demands, I will ask the law to take appropriate steps. I have not made any proper enquiries yet into their activities: I have hardly had time to breathe. But I will not hesitate if the evidence is forthcoming, if it is necessary to institute an enquiry today I will do it, be it against Kanti or be it against M. J. Akbar.

Q: Do you envisage putting up special courts against profiteers and Blackmarketeers?

A: If I can possibly do it; if there is a legal provision for it, I will certainly do it.

Q: You are said to be hostile to Communists. Has your attitude changed today?

A: Today? My attitude towards Communists is what it always was. I regard them as friends of the poor. I have said so in so many words, many a time in the past. I differ from them only in the emphasis on the nature of industrial development. In their scheme of things they believe in great economic units run by the state, whereas I believe in small economic units run by the individual. But we are allies in the sense that they are as much for the poor as I am. And they see in me a friend of theirs, a well-wisher of the poor.

RURAL REALITY

IT is a welcome sign that Prime Minister Charan Singh has spoken not only of his oft-repeated concern for rural areas but also of the necessity to bridge inequalities between the poor and rich. However, there are various ways in which this later statement may be interpreted. For example, rural orientation to policy making by itself may be looked upon as an attempt to bridge inequalities by transferring resources from "rich" industrialists to "poor" farmers. And the benefits to the rural sector may be narrowed to the provision of lower input prices for fertilizers etc. and higher prices for the marketable surplus of farmers. Will such steps really help to reduce inequality?

When Charan Singh worked hard for the enactment and implementation for zamindari abolition laws in Uttar Pradesh in the early Fifties, there was considerable

relief provided to the exploited peasants. At that time he was certainly working to reduce inequalities. His effort for the abolition zamindari, as also the fact that he himself belonged to the peasant castes whose cause he championed made him a force to reckon with as the leader of the emergent peasant caste. Subsequent years have witnessed a growing strengthening of this peasant class, specially after the green revolution in the late sixties.

Support Base

Initially, Charan Singh's support base was concentrated in Western UP and Haryana, especially among the Jats of the region, and although Jats may still constitute the hardcore of his supporters it would be a serious mistake to still regard him as only a leader of the Jats as many urbanites are apt to do. As the peasants in several parts of

the country, most prominently in the green revolution areas, have gained economic prosperity, their political aspirations have naturally increased; they would like to see their own men installed in power in Lucknow, Chandigarh and in Delhi. Charan Singh is fortunate in being accepted as their man in Delhi. This recognition has come partly because of his support of the cause of this peasantry at an early date and partly because he has been the leader of these castes from a state from which Central leaders have come generally because of its sheer size and numerical strength. But his base would not have been so strong had it consisted only of the prosperous farmers of the green revolution areas. This base has been expanded as the basis of caste alignments. In recent years, attempts have been made to create a certain solidarity among all middle peasant castes, or "backward" castes as they may be called at some places and in some situations.

This caste solidarity, which manifested itself in recent times in the demand for job reservations for backward castes in Haryana and elsewhere helped to bring the poor Yadav farmer owning an acre in East UP, or the destitute Kori farmer living on a few bighas of land in Bihar to the fold of what is called the Kisan group. On the basis of caste-cum-class alignments, thus, Charan Singh has been able to assemble the support of a fairly large section of the rural population, and not just that of the big farmers. It is another matter that he has not been a very astute and capable leader. Recently he allowed a substantial section to be alienated, at least temporarily, when he neglected his constituency and other important areas of support in Uttar Pradesh when the sugarcane farmers were in distress. His indifference to the killing of three students in Baraut town in his constituency also upset the people of the area.

In the villages of India, feelings run high over the question of land, and the strong aspiration of the landless for "Do Bigha Zamin", matched by the equally strong determination of the landowning class not to allow any distribution of land to the landless. Ironically even those who are not being deprived of any land for the purpose of distribution amongst the landless also oppose it. One reason may be that they genuinely want the entire community land to be reserved for grazing.

Clearly the progressive elements who have agreed to either join or support Charan Singh's government should be concerned about the plight of Harijans under his Government given the attitude of the hard core of his supporters towards Harijans in the past. They should make it clear to Charan Singh that a minimum programme for the welfare of Harijans and other landless should be clearly laid down and it should be adhered to strictly.

First of all no new legislation which goes back on existing land reforms should be allowed. Secondly, protection should be extended to Harijans so that they are not deprived of the small plots of land that they have already obtained. Thirdly, certain targets regarding further redistribution of land should be laid down and these should be strictly adhered to. All cases of atrocities against Harijans and tribals should be dealt with as matters of urgency and culprits punished regardless of their party affiliation.

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THE FIRST BROADCAST TO THE NATION

THE Prime Minister, Shri Charan Singh, said this evening that the first task before the nation was to revive and reinforce people's faith in a bright future. In his first address to the nation after taking over as Prime Minister on 28 July 1979, Shri Charan Singh said elimination of poverty and unemployment and the disparities of income and wealth will be given the highest priority in the programmes and policies of his government.

While small economic units would be encouraged, wherever necessary big industries would continue to be established and if necessary in the public sector also. In special cases even existing private industries would be nationalised. All backward classes, weaker sections and minorities, scheduled castes and shall be given all protection and help tribes to develop themselves, the Prime Minister

observed. The government hoped that in time an acceptable *lingua franca* will develop in the country but no language shall be imposed on any section against its will any every language shall be given the maximum opportunity for development. Unity based on values and national objectives was the need of the time and we have to restore in the minds of our people their confidence in the capacity and resilience of our democratic polity to solve our multifarious problems. The following is the text of the Prime Minister's broadcast :

"I am speaking to you tonight as your first public servant. Today, some of my colleagues and I assumed the sacred responsibility of managing the nation's affairs. It shall be our collective endeavour to discharge this trust with sincerity and devotion. We are deeply conscious of the

goodwill and affection our people have chosen to bestow on us.

All of us are painfully aware of the fact that in spite of the best wishes of our leaders, our achievements in every sphere have fallen far short of the expectations of our people. Thirty years after Independence we are almost amongst the poorest countries in the world.

Our poverty has to be eliminated and the basic necessities of life made available to every single citizen. Political leadership of the country must remember that nothing mocks our values and our dreams more than the desperate struggle of our people for existence. Nothing could, therefore, be more poignant than the look of despair in the eyes of a starving child. Nothing could, therefore, be a more patriotic objective for our political leaders than to ensure that no child will go to bed hungry, that no family will fear for its next day's bread and that the future and capacities of not a single Indian will be allowed to be stunted by mal-nutrition.

Unemployment is on the increase. There cannot be a greater misery than that young men fully qualified and wanting gainful employment, find themselves idle. We have to find employment for all of them. Indeed, employment should be the principal instrument with which poverty has to be eliminated. Elimination of unemployment will, therefore, be accorded the highest priority in programmes and policies of my government.

Disparities of income and wealth have widened over the years. There is a yawning economic and cultural gulf between our cities and our villages. This dangerous trend has to be checked. My Government will initiate steps to prevent the growth of cities beyond certain limits.

For a country like ours with its endemic economic and social problems, there is no escape except to encourage by every possible means the establishment of small economic units both in industry and in agriculture. This does not mean that my Government has any reservations about the role of big industries as a matter of principle. Wherever necessary, big industries will continue to be established and, wherever national interest so demands, established in the public sector. Not only that : in special cases even existing private industry will be nationalised.

At the same time this Government realizes that inasmuch as corruption starts at the top and, percolating down, corrupts the whole society, unless there is a high degree of personal integrity at the top level in the public life of our country, corruption in administration cannot possibly be stamped out or even substantially reduced. Although the ultimate solution lies in the hands of the people themselves who have the right to choose their leaders, the Government will take all necessary steps in this regard.

Interested parties have spread various rumours about me and my colleagues. These tend to create apprehensions about imposition of Hindi on unwilling sections of our people and justice not being meted out to minorities, and other weaker sections of our society. This propaganda is an unmitigated lie.

All backward classes, weaker sections and minorities, scheduled castes and tribes shall be ensured all protection and help to develop themselves to the optimum so that they play a rightful role in society.

Government will ensure maximum opportunities to all minorities for

development—economic, religious and cultural—and strive for their effective integration within the Indian society.

Every language shall be given the maximum opportunity for development. No language shall be imposed on any section of the society against its will, although it is this Government's fond hope that in time, an acceptable *lingua franca* will develop.

The country is today facing a grave crisis. It is not ordinary times that we are living in. Our people are fast getting disenchanted. At this critical moment, our first task is to revive and re-inforce the people's faith in a bright future.

Increasing prices have made our people apprehend the approach of an economic crisis. I want to assure the people that Government will take every possible step to meet the situation. We have a huge stock of food in Government warehouses and ample foreign reserves to meet any contingency. And inefficiency in production of coal, power, steel and cement, movement of railways, clearance of goods in the ports and deterioration of industrial relations will be dealt with a sympathetic but a stern hand.

The general law and order situation is showing signs of strain. The creeping sense of restlessness amongst the people on this score will be effectively checked.

Above all, we have to restore in the minds of our people their confidence in the capacity and resilience of our democratic polity to solve our multifarious problems. A new atmosphere of hope has to be created in the country in the place of the present state of uncertainty apprehension and despair.

Ideological differences may be difficult to resolve overnight. But a unity based on values and national objectives is not only possible but is the imperative need of our time.

In the comity of nations India with its glorious heritage and tradition has a distinctive role to play. It has to spread the message of peace and apply the healing touch at every sore spot.

I may add that in the sphere of foreign affairs my Government will continue to follow a policy of non-alignment which will not lean on any super power.

India is a rich country, blessed by Nature, and with people of great culture, traditions, skills and capacity for hard and sustained work. It would be my privilege and duty to serve all sections of the people of this country and to do whatever is possible to strengthen the moral and economic strength of the country and to improve the quality of life.

CHARAN SINGH'S SPEECH ON INDEPENDENCE DAY

IN his Independence Day speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort on August 15, 1979 the Prime Minister, Shri Charan Singh, appealed to all the secular and democratic forces in the country to strengthen the hands of the Government in eradicating poverty, unemployment and in rooting out corruption and communalism.

In a direct reference to the recent developments at the Centre, the Prime Minister reiterated that if other parties or leaders were able to demonstrate their majority, his Government will not stay even for a minute.

On the question of mid-term poll, Shri Charan Singh said that while he and his colleagues did not favour it, yet they would be prepared to seek the people's mandate.

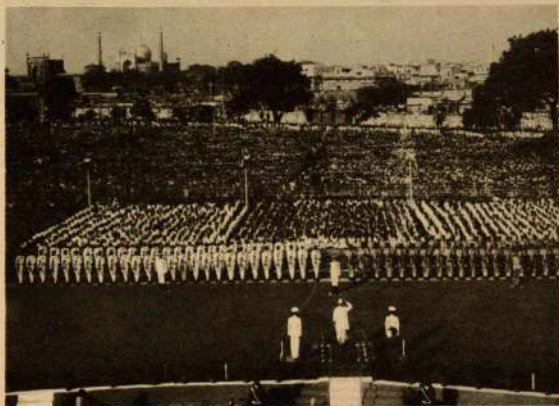
While reiterating India's desire to refrain from manufacturing nuclear weapons, the Prime Minister referred to the reported efforts of Pakistan to manufacture nuclear bomb and said that if our neighbour persisted in its determination to manufacture the bomb, his Government and the Indian people would be compelled to review the entire question.

Following is the free translation in English of the Prime Minister's speech in Hindi :—

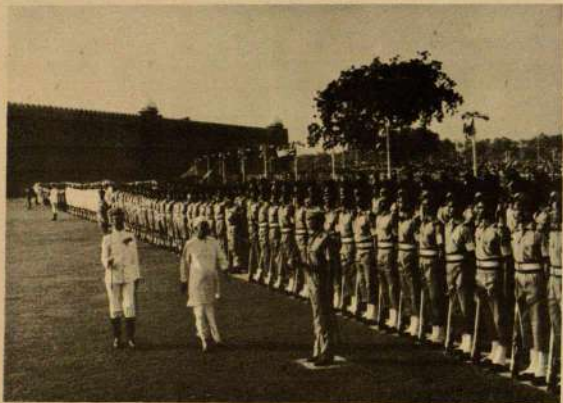
We are today celebrating the thirtysecond anniversary of our Independence. It was through the sacrifice and endeavour of Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders that the country won its independence after 200 years of the British rule. On this occasion it is only proper that we pay our homage to the Father of



Chaudhry Charan Singh Prime Minister of India addressing the Nation on the Independence Day, August 15, 1979 from the Red Fort.



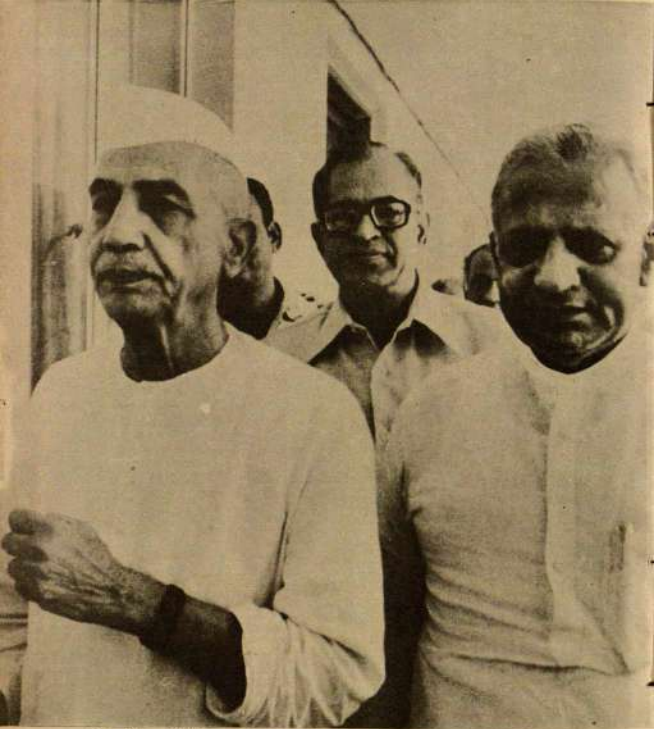
The Prime Minister Ch. Charan Singh taking Salute at the Red Fort on the eve of Independence Day.



The Prime Minister Mr. Charan Singh inspecting a Guard of Honour at the Red Fort on the Independence Day.



Chaudhry Charan Singh is seen here taking part in J. P.'s people's March held in New Delhi in May 1975.



The Prime Minister Chaudhry Charan Singh called on the Karnataka Chief Minister Mr. Dev Raj Urs in New Delhi on July 28, 1979. The Railway Minister Mr. T.A. Pai is also seen in the picture.

the Nation and other colleagues. However, just paying homage will not be enough. First of all, I would like to say a few things to you in the twenty minutes I have got at my disposal and I hope you will hear me patiently.

The recent change in the Central Government was brought about in a peaceful and democratic manner. A variety of things are said by people in this regard. They say this is an SVD Government and ask how will it run? But I would like to tell you that the Janata Government also was an SVD Government. It had one label and yet it was an SVD Government with many constituents. I would not go into details but would only mention that some persons tried to discard the ladder with the help of which they had stepped up to the seats of power. I had publicly expressed my disagreement with my closest ally, Shri Raj Narain, on 24th of June. But the events that took place after that forced me and my colleagues to leave that SVD Government. Today Congress, the Janata (S) and our friends in the Socialist Party, the Peasants and Workers Party of Maharashtra and Communist Party members, who had expressed themselves in favour of this Government in the last week of July, together have a strength of 200 and more; call it SVD or what you like. The day the other people, or the parties or leaders are able to form a larger party and challenge us and the moment we feel that we are in a minority, we will not hesitate even for a minute to step down.

I and my colleagues do not want a mid-term poll which is very expensive and creates lot of problems. But I think no party wants a mid-term poll. If, however, we have to go in for one, we will come to you to seek your vote and confidence. I have every hope that in that event, the

Congress, Janata (S) and other partners I have mentioned, will be able to form a united party which will be able to secure majority throughout the country.

Poverty—Problem No. 1

Among the number of problems facing this country, the most serious is poverty. Of the 125 nations of the world, our position is 111th which means that there are 110 countries which are more affluent than us. Three years ago our position was 104th and during this period we have slid down to the 111th position. This speaks of the level of our poverty.

The second problem is of unemployment. From the time the Janata Party took up the reigns of power, 25 lakh more young unemployed have registered their names with the Employment Exchanges. Unemployment thus is on the increase. In the rural areas both educated and uneducated are unemployed. In the cities too the educated unemployed are on the streets. Therefore, we have to eradicate unemployment.

The third problem we face in the economic field is the growing disparity between the poor and the affluent. This disparity existed even at the time of the British. In a small measure, this disparity exists everywhere and it will be impossible to erase it completely. But that Government alone will be considered good which minimises this disparity, instead of letting it increase further. Since independence, in our country the gap between the rich and the poor has increased and economic power is getting concentrated in the hands of a few people.

Besides, social tensions persist. I would not like to go into the reasons for this.

But the poor, the harijans and the weaker sections are not feeling secure. The minorities, that is the followers of religions other than Hindu, have also begun to sense similar tension. The reasons may be historic and need not be elaborated just now. It will be the endeavour of this Government to eliminate the root causes of these continuing tensions and establish peace and prosperity in the country. We will be deemed more or less, to have succeeded only if no communal riots are reported for one year or for the tenure of this Government.

Inflation

Friends, one immediate problem before us is price rise. In the last two Five Year Plans, investment for cement, coal and power production was meagre and in the last six months of Janata Government, that is from January to June 1979, these sectors were handled indifferently. Coal, power, rail-movement are critical sectors, which have an impact on the total economy. In addition, there have been strikes and ships held-up at ports unloaded for as long as one month and even 45 days. The result of all this has been the rise in price level. This Government and my colleagues in the Departments will make every effort to see that production increases. They will not be confining themselves to Delhi, they will go to the power plants and to the coal mines.

As long as production does not increase and the prices keep going up, this country will never be able to progress.

Another thing to be noted is that the prices of even such commodities as foodgrains etc., which are not in short supply are also increasing. In this connection I would appeal to the retail and

wholesale traders that they should desist being greedy and earning profits that will only hurt our people and our country. We are determined not to allow black-marketing and profiteering that has continued so far; we will not permit it to continue.

Enough Food Stocks

Friends, all of us know which sections of our people deserve Government help most. But before I go into that, I would like to tell that despite the rise in prices of certain commodities, we are not short of foodgrains; our warehouses are full and for that, we should be grateful to the farmers. The farmers will continue to work hard, even if the rain-fall is scanty or there is no rain. Therefore, so far as foodgrains are concerned, the country will not face any shortage. Another silver lining is that we have no shortage of foreign exchange and this can help us import things needed by the country.

I was referring to the sections which deserve greater attention from the Government—the harijans, the tribals, the land-less, the unemployed or under-employed and 50 per cent of our farmers who have got an hectare or less of land. These poorer sections have so far been neglected and the Government will pay special attention towards them. According to the latest estimates of the Planning Commission, 48 per cent of these living below the poverty line are in the villages and 41 per cent in the towns. These are the ones, who do not get even frugal meals to feed themselves. You can ask a question as to why there is hunger when our silos are full of foodgrains. The reason is that they do not have the purchasing power. Even if there is plenty of food around, a man will remain hungry if he does not have the money to buy it. Therefore, the

Government will pay the utmost attention to the poor and the hungry, 41 per cent of whom live behind the big palaces and bungalows in the cities and 48 per cent of whom live in the villages. If we cannot give them the attention they deserve, the Government will not be fit to remain in power.

Cottage and Village Industries

It will be our endeavour that everyone in the country finds employment. For this we have to pay special attention to increasing agricultural production and establishing cottage and village industries. When the Britishers came here first, 25 per cent of our population was engaged in such industries. Today, despite big plants and factories, only nine per cent of the population is engaged in industries. Therefore, despite lakhs of cars and large number of skyscrapers in Bombay and Delhi and the number of people who have televisions and radio sets, I feel that we are today poorer and weaker than in the time of Jahangir and Aurangzeb and the 150 years of disorder from 1707 to 1857.

To my friends in the cities, I would say that I am not inclined to answer the criticism appearing in the newspapers or the comments that various people make. I would like to say only that trade, transport and industries can develop only when there is purchasing power with the people. If the villagers, the unemployed and the poor do not have the purchasing power, our industries will not be able to develop and the country will not be able to attain affluence. Only that country is considered affluent which has a larger percentage of people engaged in non-agricultural occupations. In our country, however, only 10 per cent of the population was engaged in industries in 1951 and this

percentage remained static in 1961 and again in 1971. Industry cannot grow unless agriculture also develops. There is no other way. We will, therefore, attempt to encourage cottage and village industries in the rural areas.

Our women folk today break stones on the roads. What were their forefathers engaged in? They were independently engaged in small industries or were craftsmen. These crafts were lost during the time of British and we too continue to be indifferent in this respect. Our emphasis therefore, will be to establish cottage industries in the villages. We will also strive to increase farm production. It will also be our endeavour to assist the rural people to diversify to other occupations because prosperity cannot be achieved if majority of our people continue to depend on land.

Friends, it being the convention, I may not be able to address you for more than twenty minutes. I very much wanted to talk about a few things, but I would rather leave them there.

I would like to draw your attention as well as the attention of my colleagues and public workers to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatmaji used to say that "ends don't justify means." It is as though you can adopt any means to achieve your objectives, howsoever noble. To be able to achieve noble objectives, your means should also be equally noble. You, and especially the public workers and all of us should keep in mind this advice; otherwise we will not be able to root out corruption. Corruption knows no bounds. A country where people are corrupt, will never be able to progress whosoever may be the Leader of Party or whatever be the sound programme he might follow.

Mahatmaji also used to say that for a public worker, there is no private life different from his public life. For him, life is one and there is no compartmentalisation. If a man's public life is not clean, you can well imagine, his private life cannot be any better either and he cannot truly serve the country.

The third thing, Gandhiji always emphasised and which we have tended to forget is that "rights flow out of duties well performed." All around, you will find people asserting their rights, their demands to secure better wages and allowances. This is all right. It is necessary that people should have their rights but their rights emerge from their duties and responsibilities. How do we get our rights if we do not carry out our duties? There is need for hard work and enterprise. If you want to be prosperous, you will have to put in hard work. You will pardon me, if I say that we are not prepared to put in hard work. If you look at the other countries, you will find that people start working in their factories, schools and offices at 8 O' Clock in the morning till 5.00 in the evening, getting a break of 40 minutes in between. There are very few strikes. The emphasis there on demands is much less. In Japan, if a worker is annoyed, he only bears a black band on his arm and does not think in terms of striking work.

Coming to the foreign policy, we continue to adhere to the old policy of not aligning ourselves with any particular bloc. This will continue to be our policy because we consider it to be beneficial to the country—we will not be particularly inclined towards any country however big it might be. We believe that in the world, peace can be achieved and people can find happiness only by following the preachings of Mahatma Gandhi. If not today, the world

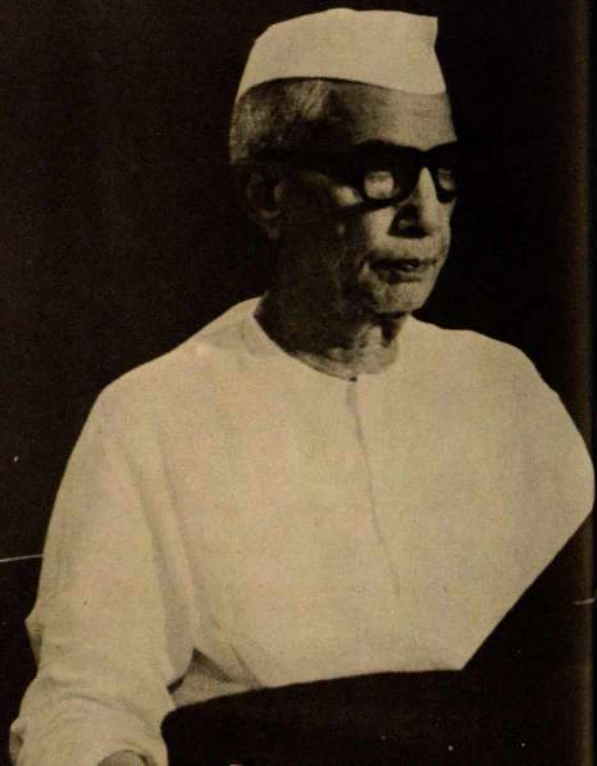
will reach the same conclusion the day after tomorrow.

So far as the countries of South Asia are concerned, our relations with them have improved, barring some cases, where too we hope there will be improvement in our relations.

In this connection I would like to mention our neighbour, Pakistan, whose people, till the other day, were part of us. Our information is that Pakistan is trying to manufacture nuclear bomb. Against whom are they making this bomb? They are friends with China; and with Russia they have not disputes. As for Afghanistan, it is a small country and Pakistan has no disputes with it either. If, therefore, I and my colleagues as also my countrymen reach the conclusion that this bomb is aimed at us, is aimed at India, then our conclusion will not be far from the truth.

It has been our decision and it remains our decision so far that we do not want to manufacture nuclear bombs, or join the race for nuclear weapons. However, if Pakistan sticks to its decision and continues in its efforts to manufacture the bomb or stockpiling of these bombs, I and my colleagues will probably be forced to reconsider the entire question.

With these words, I would like to appeal all those democratic forces, who believe in secularism, to cast aside their petty differences, and come forward to help me and my colleagues and my Government.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Radha Krishan Hooda

R.K. Hooda is a well known journalist. He began his journalistic career in *The Hindustan Times*. Later, he joined *The Statesman* and continued with it for twelve years from 1960 to 1972. Hooda had also worked for *The Times of India*, *Indian Express*, *National Herald* and *The Tribune*.

Born on March 19, 1932 in village Khidwali of Rohtak district, Hooda graduated from Government College, Rohtak in 1954. After studying Law at the Punjab University Law College, he joined his father's weekly the *Bharat Tek* as Editor in 1958. He worked as the Focus Editor of the *Shakti Weekly* published from New Delhi for some time.

He belongs to a prominent agriculturist family which has produced eminent politicians. His father Chaudhry Hari Ram was a leading Advocate of Haryana who had the honour of contesting four Presidential Elections in India.

Hooda's uncle Chaudhry Tek Ram and his second uncle Chaudhry Ram Sarup had been member of Punjab Legislative Council and Assembly for over two decades. They were the right handmen of late Sir Chhotu Ram and helped him in forming Unionist Party in Punjab.

Hooda was first introduced to Chaudhry Charan Singh when he was Chief Minister of U.P. in 1967. He also worked as Publicity Secretary for the B.K.D. and the B.L.D. Parties founded by Chaudhry Charan Singh. Since 1967, Hooda remained constantly in touch with the Chaudhry and closely watched his quick rise to the Office of the Prime Minister after joining the Desai Government in 1977. This biography is the result of Hooda's long and close association with the Chaudhry. Now-a-days Hooda is Chairman of the All India Young Farmers Conference.