

Gandhi rides the Indian tiger

by Beno John

"There was no real emergency on June 26, 1975, except Indira Gandhi's personal one, who felt her tenure as prime minister threatened."

So alleged Subarnam Swamy, economist and opposition member of the Indian parliament in a talk presented at the Humanities Center last week. This according to Swamy, is what actually happened when Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency in India.

Speaking about 'Dictatorship vs. Democracy' in India on behalf of the underground opposition movement that has been formed against the present government, Swamy accused Gandhi of tampering with the principles governing the world's largest democracy.

Swamy assumes that the move was motivated by the steadily deteriorating position of her Congress party up to the time of the "emergency." Since the 1973 by-elections there has been a rising opposition to Mrs. Gandhi's Congress party, which had once enjoyed almost unanimous support. Swamy said. The state of Gujarat, once a Congress stronghold, lost to a coalition of opposition parties. In addition, Mrs. Gandhi was convicted by the supreme court of India of illegal campaign practices. Empowered by the "emergency" she overruled the conviction with a constitutional amendment abrogating the charges of which she was convicted.

Since then she has jailed 158,000 people, 30 of them being opposition members of parliament, including the apolitical J.P. Narayan, who is recognized as a living symbol of the passive resistance he had participated in against the British, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Swamy also pointed out that civil liberties have been virtually suspended, and the press shackled by the imposition of stringent censorship which excludes any type of reporting that is "critical" and "deflammatory" towards the government.

Among the things subject to censorship, said Swamy, are the speeches of Mahatma Gandhi/Nehuru. (Mrs. Gandhi's father) and even some of Prime Minister Gandhi's past speeches.

Swamy cited Mrs. Gandhi's latest move of suspending and dismissing the state government of Tamil Nadu and subjecting it to direct rule from New Delhi as an indication that she has no intention of relaxing her hold.

Using the emergency as a pretext for social and economic reform has in actuality, insists Swamy, resulted in the opposite. Specifically, Mrs. Gandhi's anti-inflationary policies have, in Swamy's words; "maligned the Indian economy farther. Mrs. Gandhi curbed inflation mainly by squeezing all the credit in the country. The effects are only temporary. The main result is that money for expansion simply isn't available. Because of this more companies have gone out of



Indira Gandhi: still roughriding in the face of ongoing criticism.

business in the last ten months, than in the ten years preceding it."

And according to Swamy, inflation is now back on the rise. In some cases prices have doubled and tripled in the past months. Furthermore, Mrs. Gandhi has incurred the wrath of labor by an across the board wage cut of twenty percent, as well as suspending job security and the right to strike.

The only beneficiaries of the new economic policies, said Swamy, are the big business and the "top ten percent of the population." The slums of India's cities have undergone 'beautification' processes which involved the "massive bulldozing of these areas, and shipping out the thousands of slum dwellers in truckloads of areas outside of the cities, where they were told to fend for their own, without any prior arrangements made for their benefit by the government."

One of Mrs. Gandhi's justifications for the "emergency," was the containment of "external influences" undermining her government, a direct allusion to involvement of the CIA within the country. These claims are true, according to Swamy, but must be considered in the light of the KGB's extensive activities in India, especially along the Sino-Indian border where Soviets are involved in training Tibetan insurgents.

"And yet they are made (by Gandhi) to look like a nursery school, compared to the CIA," stated Swamy, who went on to display his conviction that Mrs. Gandhi's authoritarian rule poses the greatest threat to the internal security of India. "In a study of most coup d'etats, the most apparent thing is that each time power is concentrated at one or two sources, it is easier to wrest away that control."

"Within one year the democracy will be rightfully restored"

The secondary thrust of Swamy's speech was to show the efforts of the opposition, consisting of a coalition of all the major parties, and of all those who "would like to see

democracy restored." They have, on Swamy's account, organized themselves in a cohesive, united effort, staging massive rallies, and going to jail voluntarily.

Their efforts seem to focus on the achievement of a sort of mobilization reminiscent of the kind led by Mahatma Gandhi against the British. The 'underground' has its own newspapers, printed in a continual 'fly by night' operation. The general public is receptive towards the 'underground.' Even the police, maintains Swamy, are helpful, warning opposition leaders of warrants issued for their arrests. Swamy feels enough support for the underground from the public that he predicts "within one year the democracy will be rightfully restored in India."

At the heart of Swamy's argument is a belief that authoritarian rule is basically detrimental to a nation like India. What Swamy and his confederates advocate is a decentralized government that would break down the monolithic and often corrupt bureaucracy. He wishes to see a return to the free market economy, but one with built in tax incentives (such as making all savings tax deductible) that would induce investment.

Swamy, from his essentially populist platform, believes that the "depoliticization" (carried out by Mrs. Gandhi) results in inefficient government, and that "corruption is intimately related to economics."

He also professes that the one-woman-one party rule has not benefited India, and that collective leadership is the only viable alternative. "Mrs. Gandhi has let loose the tiger and she can't ride it for much longer."

Leadership in jeopardy?

Swamy referred to the fate of the late Sheike Mujib Rahman of Bangladesh who was killed in a coup engineered by disgruntled group of majors in the army. The takeover occurred after Rahman declared a state of emergency in his country. But, Swamy reassured, the Indian army is neutral largely because of the division of power between many elements. Mrs. Gandhi's policies are enforced for the most part by the Central Reserve Police, a para-military organization much like the National Guard.

What emerged finally from Swamy's speech was a description of Mrs. Gandhi's leadership, one characterized by "suspicion and a lack of proportion. She has little confidence in the members of her own party. Now she is surrounded by a retinue of uninformed, and politically inexperienced people."

He also charged Mrs. Gandhi's government of torturing political prisoners, and Swamy himself has documented 60 instances of torture of an extreme nature. If Mrs. Gandhi refuses a statement concerning this issue, Swamy vows that within a month's time he will release the list to Amnesty International and various other agencies.

The real irony, says Swamy, lies in India's official condemnation of the Chilean government's treatment of their political prisoners.

