

## THE AMBIGUOUS STRATEGY OF JP'S LAST PHASE<sup>+</sup>

Geoffrey Ostergaard

The essential clue to JP's public life is to be found in the entry in his *Prison Diary* for 21 August 1975 when he noted that during his high school days he had been 'bitten by the bug of revolution'<sup>1</sup>. Despite attempts by political opponents to portray him in the last years of his life as a 'right reactionary', the revolutionary infection that he contracted in his youth remained with him until his death. But, as is well known, his conception of revolution and of the way to achieve it changed radically over the years. JP's odyssey in quest of the Indian Revolution took him from national revolution to Marxism, from Marxism to democratic socialism, and then from democratic socialism to Sarvodaya. Some would argue that the complete progression should include 'from Sarvodaya to Total Revolution'. JP's own writings lend support to this view. In 'Manifesto for a New Bihar', published in *Everyman's*, 11 May 1975, JP, after recapitulating the steps in his journey, wrote: 'But with Sarvodaya my journey did not end. Sarvodaya itself, as its two most original proponents, Gandhi and Vinoba, pointed out is a search: a search for Truth...' And he added: 'I am of the view that the answer to the question facing me and the Bihar movement cannot be found within the framework of any single ideology, no matter how radical-sounding...' Among the ideologies he cites in this context is not only Marxism but also Gandhism.

The term 'Total Revolution' which he popularised can certainly be taken as the appropriate descriptive label of JP's 'last phase' from 1974-79. But a close reading of his work suggests that the critical step in JP's development as a revolutionary was his 'conversion' to Sarvodaya, a conversion which led

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him to embrace the concept of 'non-violent revolution'. To put it in another way, JP's Total Revolution was essentially his version of the Sarvodaya non-violent revolution. In terms of their social content and broad objectives, the two are indistinguishable: both involve a comprehensive transformation of man and society in accordance with Gandhi's original vision. One should not be surprised, therefore, to learn, as JP himself pointed out, that Vinoba had earlier used the phrase and that it gained currency in India in the title of a book dealing with the campaign for Gramdan<sup>2</sup>. If, because of its current connotations and for reasons of convenience, we restrict the use of the term to the ideas and activities of JP's last phase, we should recognise that Gandhi, Vinoba and JP all stood for total revolution. What distinguished them one from another was not the essential nature of that revolution but their views on the way to achieve it, i. e. their strategies. In his last phase, JP was preoccupied with the attempt to formulate and to carry through a revised strategy for non-violent revolution in India. He lived long enough to witness the broad results which, it must be admitted, were largely, though not wholly, negative - so much so that the wheel he began to turn in 1974 had apparently by 1980 come full circle. Had he lived longer and had his health and spirits permitted it, he would no doubt have made a full evaluation of his revised strategy. In the absence of his own evaluation, and with all the details of the relevant events of 1974-79 not yet publicly known or established, it would be idle to pretend that a serious evaluation by someone else is possible. But enough is known to begin a discussion of a matter which remains of vital interest and urgency to all those who are still committed to the concept of nonviolent revolution. It is from this perspective and in this spirit that the present essay is written.

JP's revised strategy for nonviolent revolution can, of course, be understood only in the light of the strategy it sought to supersede or, more accurately, to correct, i. e. the strategy developed largely by Vinoba and associated with Bhoodan and Gramdan. This strategy as it developed in the twenty years following the initial land-gift in 1951 may be summarised as follows<sup>3</sup>. The starting point is Vinoba's interpretation of the legacy of Gandhi which consisted principally of three elements: (i) a doctrine of nonviolence in which ends and means are seen as possessing an underlying unity of a kind which implies that means are never merely instrumental but are always also infused with values, so that means are ends-in-the-making; (ii) a guideline indicating that the attainment of 'real Swaraj' lies through a resolute pursuit of the Constructive Programme; and (iii) an attitude which proscribes constructive workers engaging in power and party politics and which enjoins them, rather, to guide political power and to mould the politics of the country without taking power themselves. Equipped with this legacy, Vinoba proceeded creatively to fashion a broad strategy for nonviolent revolution consisting of several inter-related elements. One was the development of the constructive workers into a cadre of nonviolent revolutionaries, conceived as a moral rather than



as a power-oriented elite, who would in their behaviour and life-styles exemplify the new society in the making. Organised in Sarva Seva Sangh, their main task was to mobilise the people for a revolution to be made by the people themselves, the revolutionaries serving only as the catalytic agents of radical social change. In working for this revolution, the cadre would make an appeal that was genuinely universalistic, directed to all and not to particular social groups or classes. The essence of the revolution was defined as a revaluation of values in which the twin principles of Truth and Nonviolence were accorded clear primacy. The first step in this revolution was to convert individuals, if possible on a mass scale, by appealing to both their intellect and their emotions. This appeal was to be made, not in an abstract way but concretely by focusing on a major social problem. Vinoba identified this problem in the India of the 1950s as landlessness - hence the initial programme of Bhoodan and its more radical successor, Gramdan, the voluntary villagisation of land. Acceptance of the appeal and attempts to live according to the new order of values would lead immediately, therefore, to actions indicative of the new society. The revolution would then move from the level of culture and of individual values to the levels of institutions and of social structure. Gradually, through their co-operative efforts, the people would proceed to create new institutions and new forms of social life: an alternative society, expressive of the new value system, would develop within the womb of the old. The birth of the new society would not be a traumatic event of the kind that characterises violent revolutions in which old institutions collapse and political power is transferred from the old to new governing elites. The process, though plainly visible, would be more akin to that of a biological organism renewing the cells of its body.

In developing this strategy Vinoba introduced two related conceptual innovations that are worth noting. The first concerns Gandhi's concept of satyagraha. In Vinoba's view, this should be interpreted positively to mean nonviolent assistance in right thinking, rather than negatively as nonviolent resistance to evil. The hallmark of genuine satyagraha, he argued, is its non-coercive quality, its capacity to convert the opponent. The direction of nonviolence is exactly opposite to that of violence. In the domain of violence men usually employ first the least harsh, then the harsher, and finally the harshest weapons. But in the domain of nonviolence, if they find that gentle methods do not produce the desired results, they must infer that there is something untrue in their choice of methods and proceed to substitute gentler and, if necessary, the gentlest methods. Vinoba did not rule out entirely the use of 'negative' satyagraha but, in an India which was now democratic and independent, he insisted that the occasions for its legitimate use were very rare. In pursuing Vinoba's strategy for nonviolent revolution, the accent therefore was placed on loving, gentle persuasion.

Vinoba's second conceptual innovation concerns politics. In current orthodoxy, politics is defined in terms of power, the ability to get one's way, despite resistance, using methods ranging from subtle pressures to naked violence. Such a conception, Vinoba argued in effect, can have no place in a society which accords primacy to Truth and Nonviolence. The nonviolent revolution must, therefore, develop a new politics - a politics of truth and love. The hallmark of the new politics is consensus. Since all men and women must be deemed to express part of the truth, decisions arrived at by consensus are the surest guarantee that the politics of truth and love, not the politics of power, are being practised. In their own organisation, Sarva Seva Sangh, the nonviolent revolutionaries adopted this decisionmaking procedure which they also, of course, insisted should be adopted in the gram sabhas of the Gramdan villages. In developing the new politics, the politics of the people as distinct from the politics of the State, Vinoba, in line with Gandhi's advice, was quite clear: 'we should keep ourselves aloof from the old kind'. This did not imply that nonviolent revolutionaries should not seek the co-operation of political parties and of the State in the movement's programmes, even though, when the new society was fully developed, there would be no room for parties and no place for the State. It also did not imply that nonviolent revolutionaries should not intervene in elections. Their role in this respect, however, was to be strictly non-partisan and educational, informing voters of their rights and duties, and, beyond that, trying to persuade them to practise the new politics, for example, by getting the gram sabhas in a constituency to put up a single agreed candidate who would be returned unopposed.

In the elaboration, as distinct from the initiation, of the Vinoban strategy, JP, after he joined the Sarvodaya movement fulltime in 1954, played an important role. At the outset and for nearly two decades following, he certainly accepted Vinoba's concept of 'positive' satyagraha and his view of 'the new politics'. Thus, he gave no more encouragement than did Vinoba to maverick Gandhians such as Gora, who espoused the weapon of 'negative' satyagraha, or to socialists such as Lohia, who proposed combining political action with mass nonviolent direct action. And in *From Socialism to Sarvodaya*, he stated clearly: "The politics of Sarvodaya can have no party and no concern with power. Rather its aim will be to see all centres of power abolished. The more this new politics grows, the more the old politics shrinks. A real withering away of the State."<sup>4</sup>

With hindsight, however, it is possible to detect, even in their years of closest association, a difference of emphasis and approach between Vinoba and JP. Vinoba's forte was his deep spirituality, a quality that had impressed Gandhi; his message was couched in the language of religion; he was dismissive of Western concepts and suspicious of social science; and he conveyed the impression that it was only with reluctance that he had accepted God's will



that he should take on the leadership of a social movement. JP, in contrast, though a profoundly moral person, made no claims to possess great spiritual insight; he was very much the rational humanist; he spoke the language of socialism and social justice; and, as became a trained sociology graduate, he sought to unite Gandhism with social science. His earlier career in conventional politics and his interest in social science made him more aware than Vinoba of how important it was for the movement to achieve tangible, material, as distinct from symbolic, results and of the problems of relating the old and the new politics. With regard to the latter, he published in 1959 his *Plea for the Reconstruction of Indian Polity*, an exposition of the theory and institutional forms of a communitarian, participatory democracy in the Indian context. In the same year the Government of India launched its programme for a new pattern of local government in the rural areas. This Panchayati Raj programme of 'democratic decentralisation' bore a distinct resemblance to JP's proposals, although, of course, he argued that the reconstruction should be extended to all levels of the political system. The resemblance encouraged him to devote much of his attention in the next few years to trying to shape the Panchayati Raj institutions in the way he envisaged in his *Plea*. His efforts were unrewarded, but the point to be noted here is that Vinoba was markedly unenthusiastic about Panchayati Raj, arguing that it was a programme without substance and one that would make sense only after Gramdan was achieved. The difference between the two men was symptomatic of their rather different approaches to Sarvodaya strategy. Vinoba was concerned to pursue what may be described as a purist alternative strategy, concentrating on building the new cells of the Sarvodaya society, ignoring the old politics. JP, on the other hand, was pursuing a less purist strategy which sought to shape and re-shape the old politics into the new. In a sense, Vinoba was working 'outside' the existing system, endeavouring to develop a new system which would eventually replace the old, while JP was working in a non-partisan way 'inside' the existing system, endeavouring to transform it into the new<sup>5</sup>.

In the period 1965-69 Vinoba's approach to Sarvodaya strategy was clearly in the ascendancy. In accordance with his 'gentle, gentler, gentlest' formula, the concept of Gramdan was modified to widen its appeal (the modification, 'Sulabh Gramdan', involving significant concessions to the principles of private property), and the too of an campaign for Gramdan declarations was launched, concentrating in Bihar. At the propaganda level, the results were impressive: by 1969 the great bulk of villages in Bihar had apparently pledged themselves in favour of Gramdan, Bihar was proclaimed the first 'Statedan', and the leaders of the movement could comfort themselves with the thought that by the end of the Gandhi Centenary Year the foundations of Gramswarajya had been laid, at least in one state. But as soon as the movement set about the more taxing task of redeeming the Gramdan pledges, it became apparent

that the foundations had not been truly laid or were crumbling into dust, JP was among the first to appreciate this fact. In June 1970, in response to a Naxalite threat, he made a determined effort to implement Gramdan in the Musahari block. Other Sarvodaya workers on the advice of Vinoba, who had retired to his ashram and was therefore no longer actively involved in the day-to-day direction of the movement, concentrated their efforts in the Saharsha district. In seeking to implement Gramdan, the Sarvodaya workers came, in JP's phrase, 'face to face' with the harsh realities of Indian rural life. In the Musahari block it was found that a large proportion of the villages had been improperly declared Gramdan: they were 'bogus Gramdans' in which the work had to begin again from scratch. Similar findings were reported in other areas and, although some progress was made in implementing Gramdan and, beyond that, in engaging in a few hundred villages in the task of development, the overall results of all the efforts were extremely disappointing. There was certainly no evidence that the Sarvodaya movement had reached the take-off point at which 'a movement of workers' was being transformed into 'a movement of the people', signifying the revolutionary elite's success in generating 'people's power'. In this situation, the natural response of many Sarvodaya workers was to question the movement's strategy. In *Face to Face*, published in December 1970 when he was still hopeful of implementing Gramdan, JP provided a clear hint of what was to be one element in a revised strategy. After reflecting on the failure of the Government's land reforms and the futility of the Naxalite movement, he wrote: 'If democracy is found wanting and violence offers no solution, what then is the way out? To find the way, we will have to go back to Gandhiji... Conditions seem to be ripening in the context of our present programme that may necessitate large-scale satyagraha' <sup>6</sup>.

Reversion to large-scale satyagraha of the 'negative' kind used by Gandhi in the struggle to oust the British Raj was not, however, the only element canvassed by JP and other Sarvodaya activists in their search during the next few years for a revised strategy for nonviolent revolution. A study of the movement's publications, recording what amounts to a prolonged strategy debate, reveals that by the end of December 1973, i.e. before the Gujarat agitation erupted in January 1974, Sarvodaya 'new thinking' had embraced several additional points. These may be listed as follows. (i) It was necessary to enlarge the existing cadre of revolutionaries. The main source of new recruits was identified as rebellious students and idealistic youth, the group that in recent years had constituted the 'revolutionary vanguard' in many advanced industrial countries of the West but also in developing countries, such as Thailand. Hence, JP's 'Appeal to Youth Power', issued in December 1973. (ii) It was also necessary to enlist the active support of concerned but politically uncommitted citizens, especially middle class professional people and intellectuals. Plans for a new weekly paper directed to this group



and for an appropriate organisation were laid in the summer of 1972, plans which led to the publication beginning July 1973 of *Everyman's Weekly* and the setting up of Citizens for Democracy in April 1974. (iii) In order to mobilise wider popular support than the programme of Gramdan had achieved, it was necessary for Sarvodaya workers to take up, articulate, and seek to resolve the current problems affecting the masses, such as rising prices, unemployment, endemic corruption, and the eviction of tenant farmers. (iv) The movement, hitherto centred on the villages, should extend to the towns and cities, developing a programme and organisational forms appropriate to both rural and urban areas. In this connection, JP in December 1973 put forward 'a programme of immediate socio-political action' to build a structure of direct People's Democracy as an alternative to the existing Party Democracy<sup>7</sup>. Its primary organs, composed not of representatives but all adult residents, were to be gram sabhas in the villages and neighborhood and ward councils in the towns and cities. Similar bodies, which he called 'communities of work', were to be set up in factories, offices, educational institutions and other work places. All these primary bodies were to meet regularly to discuss their common problems and to evolve co-operative and collective forms of action to manage their affairs. (v) At the same time, the movement should take a more active interest in what was happening in the arena of conventional power and party politics. Without abandoning their non-partisan stance, the workers should apply more resolutely the strategy outlined in Gandhi's Last Will and Testament, seeking to guide political power and to mould the politics of the country. (vi) Finally, and related to the last two points, the movement should intervene more actively in elections, albeit still in a non-partisan way. Instead of restricting itself to voters' education, the movement should proceed to promote the idea of 'people's candidates'. In outlining his programme for People's Democracy, JP suggested that, after functioning for some time, the primary bodies would be grouped together horizontally and vertically to form the secondary institutions. As an illustration of what he had in mind in the context of State elections in a rural constituency, JP envisaged the gram sabhas in about 100 villages each sending a delegate or delegates to a Gram Sabha Delegates' Council. This Council would nominate, unanimously or by consensus, the people's candidate, and it would then 'be for the people to vote for him and to have him elected'. The Council would continue to function after the election, maintaining contact with the gram sabhas, reporting to them and receiving their advice, while also keeping in touch with the people's representative, giving him advice and instructions.

It would be incorrect to suggest that, by the end of 1973, the Sarvodaya movement as such had come round to adopting a revised strategy embracing the seven elements (including large-scale satyagraha) outlined above. But many of the activists, including most of the executive of Sarva Seva Sangh,

were thinking in these terms. This explains why, when JP accepted the invitation to lead the student-initiated agitation in Bihar after 18 March 1974, they - with significant exceptions, including notably Vinoba - rallied round him so quickly. The Gujarat agitation of January to March 1974 convinced them, as it did JP, that a revolutionary situation was developing in the country. And when the students of Bihar, JP's home state and the first Gramdan State, took up the struggle, they concluded that their years of labour in the field were at last beginning to bear fruit. An unforeseen but unparalleled opportunity had arisen whereby the nonviolent revolution could take a great leap forwards. It is significant that all seven elements of the revised strategy were pursued, in one way or another, by the Bihar movement as it developed over fifteen months. This strengthens the view that JP's Total Revolution was an up-dated version of the Sarvodaya revolution.

On the face of it, the seven elements, while not adding up to a complete strategy, appeared to provide a promising revolutionary strategy in the Indian context. And the strategy looked even more promising when, in the course of the Bihar movement, another element was added. This was the challenging of State power. Manifested originally in the demand of the Students' Struggle Committee for the resignation of the Bihar Government and the dissolution of the State Assembly, a demand which JP somewhat hesitantly endorsed, the challenge deepened as the movement developed. With the Bihar Government propped up by the Union Government, it became increasingly clear that the challenge had to be directed against the latter also. The challenge became more significant when, following the success of the Bihar bandh in early October 1974, plans were announced for the setting up of Janata Sarkars, a system of People's Government at the village, panchayat and block levels, and for the establishment at the State level of a People's Assembly. These plans could be interpreted as providing for 'parallel government' as the revolution entered the crucial stage of 'dual power' in which the established government would compete for legitimacy with the alternative revolutionary government. A special edge was given to the challenge by JP's appeals to the police and armed forces - the concrete expressions of the coercive power of the State - not to obey illegal and immoral orders, and by his suggestion that at a later stage 'the leaders of the revolution may call upon the army to come over to their side' <sup>8</sup>. From a revolutionary perspective, the challenge to State power filled an important lacuna in Sarvodaya strategy. Hitherto, that strategy had assumed that the State was neutral as between different sections of society and that State power would not be used to crush the nonviolent revolution but would, somehow, dissolve as people's power was generated. Now, JP admitted that it was 'glaringly apparent' that 'the state system was subservient to a variety of forces with their interests entrenched in keeping it a closed shop' <sup>9</sup>. And, faced with the State's attempts to repress the revolutionary movement, he was proposing, in effect, that the people, through the popular



institutions thrown up in the course of the struggle, should transfer State power to themselves, in much the same way as had happened in the early stages of the Russian Revolution.

There seems little doubt that JP did see the Janata Sarkars as the embryonic equivalent of the Russian soviets<sup>10</sup>, and if he had developed this idea and, more importantly, succeeded in giving real substance to it, the Bihar movement would have moved very clearly in a revolutionary direction. But another new element injected into the developing strategy - the attempt to mobilise the opposition parties in support of the people's movement - ran in a counter, essentially reformist, direction. Nothing reveals more sharply JP's ambivalence, his hovering between reforming and revolutionising the system, and the radical ambiguity of the whole strategy, than his attempts to integrate this element. At the outset and in accordance with his idea of people's as opposed to party democracy, he made a determined effort to ensure that the movement was as non-partisan as it could be in the circumstances where it was confronting a Congress Government supported by its junior ally, the CPI. These efforts continued down to the time of the imposition of the emergency. And in Bihar it is arguable that his efforts largely succeeded, with JP calling most of the shots. But, at the same time, when he found that the opposition parties could not be kept out of a people's movement and that they added dynamism to it, he positively solicited their support and denied that the immediate aim was partyless democracy. It seems evident that the opposition parties were interested in using the movement for their own ends and that, equally, JP was seeking to use them for movement purposes, neutralising and radicalising them in the process. It was simply unfortunate that the first opposition party to rally in support of the movement was the Jana Sangh. But JP did try to redress the balance by seeking the support of the CPM (admittedly a weak party in Bihar) and even of Naxalite groups that were prepared to adopt the peaceful tactics of the movement. And he was not altogether mistaken in his belief that the Jana Sangh was being radicalised. It is, certainly, significant that the Bihar movement gave rise to no overt communal rioting.

But the matter was more complicated than this. One of the factors prompting the idea that the Sarvodaya movement should take a more active interest in happenings in the political arena was the belief that Indian democracy under Mrs. Gandhi's leadership was moving rapidly in an authoritarian and, indeed, totalitarian direction. If this belief was well founded - and there was plenty of evidence that it was - the natural reaction was to look for ways to 'save democracy', however imperfect that democracy might be. Even from a revolutionary perspective, a defensive posture made sense: the more authoritarian the political system became, the more difficult it would be to carry through a nonviolent revolution. Now, the classical way of avoiding authoritarianism is to institutionalise a system of countervailing power. At the

political level, this is best achieved when two main parties regularly alternate in government, the 'out' party checking the 'in' party which, though possessing a temporary majority, knows that it may lose its majority at the next election. JP, while favouring partyless democracy as the ideal, appreciated the logic of this classical view; and, acting in effect on the maxim that 'the best should not be an enemy of the good', he supported the idea of seeking to establish a viable alternative to the dominant Congress Party.

It is of great interest to note that in March 1973, twelve months before he accepted leadership of the Bihar movement, he had been invited by Biju Patnaik to take the lead in new efforts to unite the opposition parties. He declined the invitation which, he pointed out, ignored the position and political convictions which he had held since 1954 and which he had 'no desire to change now or later'; but he added that he would lend his 'moral support and be available for consultation and advice' to those prepared to work for such a goal. He went on to state four points that should be kept in mind:

(i) 'the effective Opposition must necessarily represent forces of radical, even revolutionary, change'; (ii) 'the consolidation of the Opposition forces must be principled and not opportunistic'; (iii) 'the sad spectacle of the coalition governments of 1967 and 1969 ... should never be repeated'; (iv) 'the proposed Opposition must not be consumed by mere negative aims, such as "Indira Hatao" but should place before the people a positive policy and programmes and give assurance of being able to carry them out within a stated time-period'<sup>11</sup>.

In the context of the Bihar movement, the non-Communist opposition parties did take steps towards unity, the first significant step being the fusion of seven parties to form the BLD in August 1974. JP, while insisting that the Bihar movement was a people's movement and not a movement of the opposition parties and while deploring the failure of those who could not think 'outside the framework of Western democracy', welcomed the development<sup>12</sup>. In November 1974 a more significant step was taken when, on JP's initiative, the National Co-ordination Committee, including representatives of the four opposition parties which later merged to become the Janata Party, was set up to assess the significance of the Bihar movement and the prospects for similar movements in other states. On this occasion, JP again firmly rejected an invitation to lead a new national party and argued: 'It would be a profound mistake to look at the Bihar struggle as a struggle between the opposition parties ... and the ruling party. What you see in Bihar is a struggle between Student Power and People's Power on the one hand and State Power on the other. And the struggle is not for a capture of power... for replacing the Congress government with the opposition but for purification of government and politics, including those of the opposition, and for fashioning instruments and conditions for taming and controlling power, irrespective of which party and parties happen to be in power for the time being'<sup>13</sup>.



Nevertheless, as the Bihar movement in the next seven months acquired a national dimension, and whatever may be true of the struggle in Bihar itself, it took on increasingly the character of a movement of the opposition parties whose overriding objective was that of replacing Congress governments. The four conditions for opposition unity laid down by JP in March 1973 were lost sight of, even by JP himself. In this period, JP's attempt to ride the two horses of Reform and Revolution, charging as they were in different directions, began to look like the daring but impossible feat that it was. The increasing ascendancy of the opposition parties as the movement became national is, of course, readily explicable. Except in eastern Uttar Pradesh, nothing remotely resembling the people's movement in Bihar had developed. In its absence, and with Sarva Seva Sangh split over the issue of support for the movement, a split which led to its temporary 'freezing' after March 1975, JP was constrained to rely more and more on the opposition parties in spreading the movement<sup>14</sup>.

This fact in itself might not have proved fatal if JP's strategy had not included the element of engaging actively in the electoral arena. In the ferment created by the people's movement in Bihar, the opposition parties might have been allowed to pursue their own objectives and even encouraged to unite, with little or no harm being done, provided that a clear distinction was maintained between such activities and those of the movement for total revolution. In principle, the revolutionary movement might have adopted nonviolent direct action as its sole mode of action, ignoring elections altogether. Properly conceived, nonviolent direct action has the potential to achieve all the objectives of a nonviolent revolutionary movement<sup>15</sup>, and from a revolutionary perspective there are strong arguments for relying exclusively on this mode of action. In the era of universal suffrage, the principal function of elections is to bestow legitimacy on the existing political system and to grant to the political elite, or one section of it, the right to govern. At one stage in the Bihar movement, JP did come near to relying solely on nonviolent direct action when he stated that 'in this revolutionary process... the main driving force will be direct action, both combative and constructive, of the youth and the people'<sup>16</sup>. But the operative word turned out to be 'main', and by November 1974 the emphasis had been placed elsewhere.

It is widely believed that the critical turning point in the movement's direction came on 18 November 1974 when JP accepted Mrs. Gandhi's challenge to allow the issue of the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly to be decided at the next election. But a close inspection of the record puts a somewhat different gloss on the matter. On 25 August, The Tribune reported that JP had challenged the Prime Minister to hold a referendum in Bihar on the issue of dissolution. A referendum of course, is not an election<sup>17</sup>. But on 29 October - two days before his abortive talks with Mrs. Gandhi which were followed

by her 'challenge' - JP declared that he was ready to test the Prime Minister's strength at elections in Bihar and that his slogan would be 'Not a single vote for Congress' <sup>18</sup>. Then, on 8 November, four days after 'the battle of Patna', he stated that the students and people of Bihar were not in a hurry: 'Our struggle will continue and finally it will all be settled at the next election' <sup>19</sup>. Certainly, Rajunder Puri, writing in the issue of *Everyman's* published on 16 November, had a clear understanding that the movement was entering a new phase. The euphoria created earlier by the slogan of total revolution was, he thought, giving place to the quieter, more deadly resolve to defeat the Congress Party at the next elections. The people's efforts to remove corrupt Congress regimes would now be supplemented by an attempt to create an organisation capable of winning the next elections and replacing the ruling party. 'The biggest impediment to the formation of a new party - the search for an acceptable national leader - has been surmounted. Whether he decides to head a party or not, JP will remain the moving spirit and inspiration of the new party'.

The rhetoric of JP's speech of 18 November, with its call to Mrs. Gandhi to 'hear the rumbling of the chariot of time' and to 'vacate the throne for the people are coming', helped to disguise the fact that in entering the electoral arena the movement was choosing to do battle on the ground that suited her best. So long as the movement stuck to the ground of direct action, the main methods of countering it were to make concessions and to repress it, both of which had not proved very effective. But if the movement could be enticed into the electoral arena, Congress would have a better chance of winning. It is not surprising, therefore, that both the Bihar and Union Governments construed JP's acceptance of Mrs. Gandhi's challenge as signalling the recognition of the failure of the agitation <sup>20</sup>. This, of course, was not how JP saw it. He argued that by bringing 'elections into the arena of struggle' Mrs. Gandhi, although 'a clever and astute politician', had 'committed a great mistake' <sup>21</sup>.

Even at this stage, JP's decision to confront Mrs. Gandhi in the electoral arena, while not contesting himself personally need not have had disastrous consequences for the movement if the electoral battle had been confined to Bihar. In Bihar, if the movement had been able to promote successfully the idea of 'people's candidates', the next election for the State Assembly would have been a radically different kind of election from any preceding one. But the logic of the decision soon made itself felt in a situation where it came to look increasingly likely that Congress could be defeated not only in Bihar but also in other states and at the national level. One sign of this was the dropping of the programme of 'electing' a People's Assembly. In his speech of 18 November, JP indicated that this item was still on the agenda, but by the end of the year it had been quietly dropped.



Another sign was a change of attitude towards the programme for People's Government. Although this particularly vital part of the movement's programme was not to be dropped but on the contrary to be promoted more vigorously, it was no longer to be seen as embryonic 'parallel government'. JP denied having used such a phrase about the Janata Sarkars, and he emphasised less their potentially revolutionary role than their role as 'watch-dogs' over the existing government and administration<sup>22</sup>. Yet a further sign was JP's announcement on 10 February 1975 of the suspension of satyagraha in front of the Bihar Assembly, although mass dharnas and gheraos would, he said, continue to be organised on appropriate dates from time to time. Not all the signs pointed one way. The decision made in January 1975 to set up a new one-lakh strong non-partisan youth corps, the Vahini, and repeated calls to extend the Janata Sarkar system could be interpreted to mean that the Bihar movement was being deepened and consolidated. The underlying reality, however, was that the people's movement was diluting its revolutionary potential.

JP's decision to take the movement into the electoral arena may have been partly influenced by a feeling (that must have been encouraged by 'the battle of Patna') that this was one way he could keep the movement peaceful in face of the increased violence of the authorities. He was probably also disappointed by the performance of the students and youth, 'the soldiers' of the movement who, along with the Sarvodaya workers, constituted the revolutionary vanguard. The students had not responded very well to his call to them to quit college for a year to devote themselves full-time to the revolution; they showed a strong preference for combative encounters as against hard constructive work; in general they appeared to lack the stamina to carry on a sustained revolutionary struggle; and there were the inevitable problems of some students misusing their powers. These factors, combined with his conviction that Congress would be routed in an electoral contest, must have made the temptation to accept Mrs. Gandhi's challenge well-nigh irresistible.

Outside Bihar, in the emerging national movement in which the opposition parties were playing a critical role, the signs that it was treading the reformist road were less ambiguous. The programme of organising, on 6 March 1975, a mass March to Parliament to present a People's Charter of Demands was, certainly, an effective way of ensuring that 'the rumbling of the chariot of time' would be heard in Delhi as well as Patna, but it clearly indicated the reformist direction the movement was taking. The point here is not so much that the demands listed were themselves reformist: there is no reason why a revolutionary movement should not seek to mobilise people by listing desirable reforms, especially if some of those reform demands cannot be met without a radical transformation of the existing system. The point, rather, is that the tactic was itself basically reformist. It was a march towards Parliament,

not towards revolution, a march implying that, somehow, the former would be instrumental in achieving the latter. JP himself likened the march to Gandhi's salt march of 1931, but the comparison was not well chosen. Gandhi's march was to Dandi, not to the power centre of the British Raj, and it culminated in the marchers symbolically making salt illegally for themselves. It was also followed up by nonviolent sieges of salt-works elsewhere, not by whetting appetites for a coming election<sup>23</sup>. The Gujarat election marked another step along the reformist road. Although a method of nonviolent direct action - Morarji Desai's fast - was used to constrain Mrs. Gandhi to call that election, in the election itself nothing really vital was at stake for a movement for total revolution. The Janata Front's candidates were not people's candidates, and the opposition parties made clear that they would have no truck with such an idea. JP indicated as much that nothing vital was at stake by his announcement that he would not campaign for the opposition in Gujarat. The fact that he subsequently changed his mind did not mean that the reality had changed: it meant only that he was losing his way, advancing further in the wrong direction.

In making this judgement one is not simply using hindsight because, at this time, there were a number of people in the total revolution camp who had come to the same conclusion. Among them was Anant Patwardhan<sup>24</sup>. Another was Ajit Bhattacharjea. The latter, in an article in *The Indian Express*, 24 May 1975, argued that a 'hard choice' confronted JP. Hitherto, JP had been 'working at two levels: one the movement, the other the more familiar role of the social democrat - fighting for civil liberties, against electoral malpractices, trying to promote a viable opposition and to strengthen democratic institutions'. JP did not believe that the two functions were contradictory and could cite instances where a sympathetic government had made it easier to promote social change and fight injustice. The objectives, opined Bhattacharjea, might not be contradictory, 'but the stage at which both can be pursued at the same time is over'. JP now had to choose between either devoting all his energies to developing the revolutionary movement in Bihar itself or continuing his 'social democratic' activities.

Faced with this choice, it says much for JP's revolutionary instincts that, after returning from Gujarat, he decided to choose the former. At a conference of Sarvodaya workers held at Jabalpur, 14-16 June, he announced that henceforth he would concentrate on building Janata Sarkars in rural Bihar and would not undertake further tours in other states - although, if invited, he might make special visits outside Bihar. The announcement was all the more significant because it was made shortly after dramatic developments of 12 June - the day when the Gujarat election results came in and when Judge Sinha gave his judgement against Mrs. Gandhi on the election petition in the Allahabad High Court. After leaving Jabalpur, JP proceeded - significantly in the company of Bhattacharjea - to tour villages in the Bhojpur district of Bihar, an allegedly Naxalite area; and on 16 June he let it be known that he



would not lead the opposition parties' demonstration outside the President's House in New Delhi to demand Mrs. Gandhi's resignation. Although he thought that Mrs. Gandhi had compounded her guilt by continuing as Prime Minister 'without any legal or moral right to the office', his immediate reaction, it would seem, was to play the matter coolly. But, as it turned out, he could not easily escape the compulsions inherent in the logic of events and in his role as the symbol of the opposition. The opposition parties, provided with an unexpected opportunity to end Mrs. Gandhi's rule, if not that of Congress, without waiting for the next general election, decided to launch a satyagraha campaign to compel her to resign. Roop Narayan and Raj Narayan went to Patna to persuade JP that his presence in the capital was indispensable - and persuaded he was. On his arrival in New Delhi on 23 June, JP found that the executives of the non-Communist opposition parties had already reached a large measure of agreement on the creation of a united party and on plans for the satyagraha campaign.

The decision to go ahead with the latter was a tactical mistake of the highest magnitude for which JP, who in 1973 had warned the opposition against being consumed by mere negative aims, such as 'Indira Hatao'; must bear a heavy responsibility<sup>25</sup>. It provided just the excuse that Mrs. Gandhi, now sensing she might after all lose the coming general election, needed in order to justify, with some semblance of plausibility, the imposition of the emergency. That imposition vindicated JP's fears about Mrs. Gandhi's authoritarian tendencies but, more significantly, it dramatically changed the entire political climate and effectively put an end to any people's movement for total revolution.

In some sense, of course, the movement led by JP continued throughout the 21 months of the emergency, but it was a movement whose overriding objective was now plainly defensive: to restore the status quo ante, the democracy, however imperfect, that had existed before the emergency. Mrs. Gandhi had firmly regained the initiative, and the opposition was largely reduced to responding to her actions. Under the auspices of the underground Lok Sangharsh Samiti and other opposition bodies, significant direct actions, predominantly nonviolent, were undertaken, involving thousands of people and leading to thousands of arrests. JP was the symbol of this resistance and, after his release from jail and from the sick-bed to which he was henceforth firmly tied, he did much to encourage nonviolent direct action. He even went so far as to say that, if nonviolence did not succeed, he would not get in the way of those who took to violence. But the main effect of the emergency on his thinking was to impel him further than he had already gone in the direction of conventional politics. In his *Prison Diary* on 10 October 1975, he noted that, if parliamentary elections were announced on schedule, he 'would advocate stoppage of confrontation with government and call for an all-out effort to win the elections'. And in an interview given on 12 February 1976, reported only,

of course, in the foreign press<sup>26</sup>, he reflected on the general merits of political as opposed to nonviolent direct action. If he had foreseen how easily democracy in India could be turned into dictatorship, he would have tried, he said, to lead the people's movement with 'much more thought, given more attention to finding another way ... I think I would not have gone as far as non-co-operation, non-payment of land and other taxes ... but would have concentrated more on political action rather than direct action. I would not have joined a party myself but would have paid more attention to "elections"; in preparing for them; to gather together the opposition parties to see that only one candidate from the opposition parties stood in any constituency ...".

From this interview it seems clear that JP felt that the country had been saddled with a dictatorship as a result of his general advocacy, and the movement's use, of direct action. For this view, there was no real justification. At most it can be argued that the emergency had been precipitated by his, and the opposition's, plans for a particular direct action campaign, the satyagraha to compel Mrs. Gandhi's resignation. But, as suggested, it seems more plausible to argue that those plans provided merely an excuse for Mrs. Gandhi's decision, the real reasons for which were to safeguard her own position and to deal a pre-emptive blow to shatter the opposition before an election. Nevertheless, in keeping with his new emphasis on political action, JP directed most of his energies during the emergency towards securing two limited objectives: the unification of the non-Communist opposition parties and the holding of the postponed general election. In the circumstances, these were sensible tactics. Pressing for elections at a time when Congress now looked like winning them was particularly astute, since continued refusal to hold them placed Mrs. Gandhi on a wrong footing and this was an issue on which wide support could be obtained<sup>27</sup>. But both were essentially liberal not revolutionary tactics.

JP's failure, despite premature announcements to the contrary, to achieve the unification of the opposition parties by the end of 1976, was probably a factor in Mrs. Gandhi's surprise decision to hold the general election which, only a few weeks before, she had indicated would be postponed yet again. But JP's eventual success with both tactics and the victory of the Janata Party, which at the outset of the campaign even he had not anticipated, should not disguise the fact that by early 1977 he and Mrs. Gandhi were sharing common ground. In referring to elections, they both used curiously similar language. 'Every election', said Mrs. Gandhi, '... is an opportunity to cleanse public life of confusion'<sup>28</sup>, echoing words used by JP in his letter to her, dated 17 September 1975: 'In a democracy a General Election (provided it is fair and free) acts like a powerful catharsis, cleansing the political atmosphere, easing tensions and bringing health and vigour to the body politic'<sup>29</sup>. Of course, they defined the issues of the election very differently, but they were



now agreed that those issues should be decided at the ballot box, in the parliamentary arena.

The resurgence of 'the JP wave' of 1975 in the form of 'the Janata Party wave' of 1977 encouraged the illusion of JP and many others that 'people's power' had manifested itself again in a spectacular fashion. The Janata victory was hailed as 'a second nonviolent revolution', comparable to the attainment of Independence in 1947, providing a second opportunity to complete the revolution which Gandhi had begun. Such a description, however, reveals only how much political rhetoric can get in the way of political understanding. Independence may be described as a political revolution of sorts, involving as it did the transfer of power from an alien to a native political elite. But in no comparable sense did the 1977 election effect a political revolution, except in the banal sense in which any election which results in a change of the party in government constitutes a 'revolution'. Such a 'revolution' had been theoretically, if not practically, possible at all previous general elections since Independence. At most the 1977 election can be described as halting (perhaps only temporarily) the counterrevolutionary efforts of Mrs. Gandhi to institutionalise the constitutional dictatorship of the emergency. The paradoxical emergence of JP, the long-time advocate of partyless democracy, as 'the Father of the Janata Party', encouraged the illusion that the new government was 'the revolutionary government' he had spoken about during the Bihar movement. But a simple listing of its leading members should have suggested that nothing revolutionary was to be expected from such a government. The Janata Government, in truth, was equipped to perform only a limited historical role - that of dismantling the structure of 'the Indira raj'. For most of its leaders, the Total Revolution had been little more than a slogan, and - as JP had openly suspected before the emergency - it was effectively over once they had achieved political office.

Of course, the cadre of total revolutionaries - the Sarvodaya workers who had adopted JP's revised strategy, and his youthful followers who, after the election, re-launched the Vahini as a national organisation - understood that the election of Janata governments at the Centre and in many of the States was only a step on the road to total revolution. But it was a step some of the consequences of which they had not foreseen. It was at the point when 'State power' came into the hands of apparently sympathetic governments that the ambiguous nature of the relationship between 'State power' and 'people's power' was revealed. In Bihar 1974-75, the generation of 'people's power', which had eluded Sarvodaya workers in campaigning for Gramdan, was achieved - to the extent that it was achieved at all - through struggle against 'State power'. A combative struggle provided the dynamism necessary for the constructive struggle to institutionalise 'people's power' through Janata Sarkars. But JP's strategy had been predicated on the assumption that confrontation between

'State power' and 'people's power' would be only a passing phase. 'As a matter of principle', he had said, 'I do not believe in confrontation but sometimes it becomes inevitable when the rulers refuse to pay heed to wiser counsels.'<sup>30</sup> Except for the important difference that JP had come to recognise that sometimes confrontation with the State was inevitable, his position was not all that far removed from the position of Vinoba who sought the co-operation of the State in achieving nonviolent revolution. In JP's view, therefore, the Janata victories of 1977 set the stage for a period, not of confrontation but of co-operation between 'State power' and 'people's power'. What the strategy did not explain was how, in the absence of confrontation, 'people's power' could be generated or, if it can be supposed to have been manifested in the elections, sustained after the votes had been cast.

During the Bihar movement, JP had insisted that even after the election of a new Assembly, the people through the institutions thrown up in the course of the struggle would continue to exercise control over the legislators, the government and the administration. In line with this thinking but in very different circumstances, JP in 'India of my dream', his eve-of-poll appeal, promised, if the Janata Party were elected, to 'launch a crusade to set up People's Committees at every level for ensuring that the election pledges are honoured'<sup>31</sup>. In fulfilling this promise, JP thus envisaged a structure of People's Committees fulfilling the watch-dog role he had spoken of earlier. But he still did not explain how, in the absence of combative struggle, the successors to the Janata Sarkars could be effectively set up. Sarva Seva Sangh, as one of the main planks in its programme, has taken on the task of establishing People's Committees but, by the summer of 1980, only some 10 000 had been set up<sup>32</sup>; and, although in a few areas some have been active, they have not been able to fulfill the role envisaged for them.

JP's own explanation of the failure of a new people's movement, using People's Committees as its instruments, to get off the ground after the 1977 elections, was that the momentum created by the Janata victory was lost and that his illness prevented him actively exercising leadership<sup>33</sup>. Insofar as the momentum was lost, JP did not appear to have appreciated how much he himself was responsible for it. When disillusionment with the Janata Government began to manifest itself after only a few months, he counselled patience. Give them a year, he said, to show what they can do. By the time the year had passed, the momentum had already been lost. And it could not be regained simply by calling on the Vahini, as he then did on 5 June 1978, to open 'the second phase' of the Total Revolution. As far as his own leadership role is concerned, JP did not resolve the apparent contradiction of a 'people's movement' being heavily dependent on his own charismatic leadership. To the extent that any popular movement depends on a leader, it is the leader's movement rather than the people's, manifesting his power, not genuine people's power. JP merited the accolade, 'Loknayak', but the fact that it was bestowed on him was a tacit confession of the people's weakness.



If JP had not been incapacitated by illness and if he had been, say, ten years younger, it is probable that events after 1977 would have turned out somewhat differently. The Janata leaders would not have been able to ignore him as much as they did, the unedifying factional squabbles which destroyed the Janata Government might have been sorted out, and there might have been a modest revival of a 'people's movement'. But it seems unlikely that events would have turned out so differently that by 1980 an observer would have found himself recording the progress of the Total Revolution rather than its apparent Total Failure<sup>34</sup>. (The latter term, of course, is rhetorical and its use in serious analysis would indicate a perverse ignorance of the continued existence and activities of the revolutionary cadre, to say nothing of the experience gained.) If this review of JP's strategy in his last phase suggests anything, it is that the seeds of post-1977 failures were sown in the preceding years. JP's revised strategy was a great advance on Vinoba's, the pursuit of which over twenty years and more had served, despite the best of intentions and some practical good results, to maintain the existing system, rather than to lead to another. (Its system-maintaining function was most glaringly revealed when the crisis finally came to a head and Vinoba and a few Sarvodaya workers allowed themselves to be used in legitimating the emergency.) JP's revised strategy, especially the element in it which emphasised the use of nonviolent direct action without making a fetish of nonviolence<sup>35</sup>, did contain the promise of real revolutionary change. But the strategy as a whole suffered from a fatal ambiguity which was reflected in the failure of those who devised and pursued it, notably JP himself, to make up their minds whether they wished to reform or to revolutionise the existing system. This ambiguity, it must be admitted, was positively helpful in the task of mobilising new resources under JP's leadership: if the movement had been perceived as clearly revolutionary, in the way that the Naxalite movement is - mistakenly<sup>36</sup>- perceived, it would not have secured such widespread support. But the very success of JP as a political mobiliser militated against his ultimate revolutionary aims. It alarmed Mrs. Gandhi sufficiently to prompt her to impose the emergency but, even before then, it had led JP to vacillate between reform and revolution and to get his priorities wrong. The revolutionary promise of the Bihar movement was thus belied and its potential for radical change dissipated, instead of being concentrated and strengthened.

If one searches for the main source of the fatal ambiguity in JP's strategy, it is to be found, I suggest, in 'the Lok Sevak Sangh element'. In the Sarvodaya strategy debate of 1970-73, JP's supporters attached considerable significance to the idea that Sarva Seva Sangh had become, in effect, the Lok Sevak Sangh which Gandhi on the eve of his assassination had envisaged flowering in place of Congress, which he had proposed should be disbanded as a political party<sup>37</sup>. Acceptance of this idea was associated with a process described as 'the politicalisation of the Sangh', a phrase to which Vinoba's supporters took strong exception on the ground that what Sarvodaya really stood for was 'the spiritual-

lisation of politics'. The central notion underlying Gandhi's conception of a Lok Sevak Sangh was that constructive workers, while not engaging in the corrupting business of power and party politics themselves, should seek to guide political power and mould the politics of the country. On Vinoba's interpretation, this implied, as we have seen, that Sarvodaya workers should keep aloof from the old politics while endeavouring to foster the new politics. On JP's interpretation, however, it implied, rather, engaging in politics in a non-partisan way in order to transform the old into the new politics. All JP's activities during his last phase were consistent with this interpretation. Even those activities concerned with promoting a viable alternative to Congress can be so considered. Just as 'the Father of the Nation' never became the official leader of the new nation-state after Independence, so 'the Father of the Janata Party' never became, and deliberately declined to become, the leader of the new party.

The apparent failure of JP's strategy, evident by the time of his death and more clearly now after the general election of 1980, to advance significantly either reform or revolution in the Indian socio-political system must prompt the question whether or not there is something radically wrong with Gandhi's Lok Sevak Sangh notion. In answering this question, one must admit that the Gandhian approach, using this notion, has shown itself to be remarkably effective for certain purposes. In the Indian political culture, perhaps more than in any other, 'saints' who are seen as being in some sense 'above politics' are capable of eliciting a deep response from masses of people<sup>38</sup>. The most obvious features of Indian political life are shameless self-seeking and the pursuit of narrow sectional interests, but these co-exist alongside selfless service and the promotion of universal values. The two are of course related: 'the saints' exhibiting the latter features shine all the more brightly against the background of thronging figures exhibiting the former. It is almost as if the entire population was party to a tacit conspiracy: 'saints' are to be permitted and even up to a point encouraged in order that others may be allowed to engage in sordid and shabby politics - a highly convenient division of labour! Feelings of guilt engendered by this 'conspiracy' provide 'the saints' with a lever to move the masses. Vinoba, with his interpretation of the Gandhian approach, did succeed in mobilising millions to participate, in some way or other, in the programmes of Bhoodan and Gramdan. If the participation of many of the millions was largely symbolic, their feelings of guilt were at least assuaged. JP, with his rather different interpretation and with his willingness to employ largescale satyagraha, had even more success as a political mobiliser. But neither achieved significant enduring results of a 'material' as distinct from a 'symbolic' kind.

From a reformist perspective, it can be argued that what is wrong with the Gandhian approach is the idea of abstaining from power and party politics. Mobilisation of individuals and groups in collective action is not enough to



effect social change at the structural level: Gandhians must, therefore, 'consciously choose to participate in politics and take up positions of authority and power in State administration'<sup>39</sup>. From the revolutionary perspective, this is tantamount to abandoning Gandhian objectives; and the argument ignores the fact that, since Independence, there has been no dearth of attempts to follow the recommendation and no shortage of 'political Gandhians' in Congress, other political parties, and State administration. The Janata Government, indeed, was headed by such an avowed Gandhian. One suspects that what is really being suggested by this argument is the sociologically naive idea that, if the Gandhian leader - Gandhi himself, or Vinoba, or JP - were to exercise State power and authority, things would turn out differently. Gandhi, Vinoba, and JP all knew better. JP was quite clear that his influence depended on his remaining in some sense 'above' the old politics.

The nonviolent revolutionary would argue that what is required is a reformulation of the Gandhian approach in precisely the opposite direction to that recommended by the reformist. What is wrong with Gandhi's formulation of the Lok Sevak Sangh thesis is contained in the phrase 'guiding political power'. In this context, 'political power' can mean only 'State power' or power in some way related to the State. The task of the revolutionary Gandhian, it can be argued, should be, not the 'guiding' but the 'abolition' of political power. The existence of political power as a separate form of social power, exercised in a special set of institutions we designate as 'the State', is one mark of mankind's alienated social life. The State is a form of alienated social power, a form created by men and women but seen as having some objective existence, standing outside and above them<sup>40</sup>. And if men and women are ever to become truly human, the State must be transcended. It must be transcended at the mental level, in the consciousness of people, by their overcoming 'the idea of the State', its 'necessity', its 'inevitability', and so on; and, concurrently, it must be transcended at the behavioural level, in the actions of people, by their relating to each other in a different way. As Gustav Landauer put it, 'The State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently'<sup>41</sup>. More concretely, this transcendence can be achieved only by people taking back to themselves the power they now delegate to others, exercising that power directly in self-managing institutions. Direct democracy is the *sine qua non* of unalienated social power. How to achieve direct democracy in all social organisations poses, of course, formidable problems, which JP tried to grapple with, though in the end unsuccessfully; but the Gandhian dialectic of means and ends precludes using alienated social power to abolish or overcome such power.

The phrase 'guiding political power', apart from presupposing the continued existence of the State, betrays a latent elitism which is antithetical to self-managing direct democracy. For political power to be guided, there must be

guides. People are thus divided into those who are guided and those who do the guiding. In Vinoba's version of the Gandhian approach, the guides have now turned out to be the acharyas who, in consensus, 'speak truth to power'<sup>42</sup>. In JP's more populist version, non-partisan Gandhians guide 'the people' who in their turn guide the politicians, the people not restricting themselves simply to 'speaking truth to power' but barking and snapping as well (the People's Committees as 'watch-dogs'). But the only real guidance compatible with self-managing direct democracy is collective self-guidance.

What this implies in terms of further revision of JP's revised strategy may be indicated briefly. It implies focusing on 'State power' as the principal opponent, remembering however that opponents are not always best overcome by direct confrontations but often indirectly by sapping and subverting their power<sup>43</sup>. It implies recognising that 'State power' is always and necessarily opposed to 'people's power', thus giving up the illusion that in some situations 'State power' will respond to or co-operate with 'people's power'. (Any response or co-operation is likely to mask only co-optation by the State of the people's movement.) It means devising programmes to ensure that, as part of the revolutionary process, the people take back their delegated power and become self-activated in and through their own self-governing institutions. And it means having the courage to rely exclusively on nonviolent direct action, both combative and constructive. The present tactic of intervening more actively in elections by promoting 'people's candidates' should be abandoned: it is not likely to be effective, raises difficult problems, such as their relationship to party candidates, and moreover it generates confusion about aims. In all normal elections (1977 with its clear cut issue was doubtless a significant exception) the tactic of boycott would be a more appropriate way of educating voters.

Only if the strategy is revised along these lines, it seems to me, is the movement inspired by JP likely to move towards total revolution and not towards failure or, at best, some modest reform, and hence perpetuation, of the existing system.

#### Notes:

- 1) Jayaprakash Narayan, *Prison Diary*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1977, p. 25.
- 2) Suresh Ram, *Towards a Total Revolution*, Sarvodaya Prachuralayam, Thanjavur, 1968. On p. 71 Vinoba is quoted as saying, 'Gramdan is not relief work but an attempt to bring about total revolution'.



- 3) For a more extended discussion of this strategy, see G. Ostergaard and M. Currell, *The Gentle Anarchists*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, especially ch. 7. For a comparison with Marxist strategy, see G. Ostergaard in K. Arunachalam and C. Sadler (eds.), *On the Frontiers*, Koodal Publishers, Madurai, 1977.
- 4) Jayaprakash Narayan, *Socialism, Sarvodaya and Democracy*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1964, pp.170-1.
- 5) Vinoba's strategy was not as purist an alternative strategy as that of the early communitarian socialist followers of Robert Owen who sought to establish new 'villages of co-operation' rather than to communise existing villages. It must be added, also, that 'outside' and 'inside' are relative terms. In a sense, Vinoba was also working 'inside' the system. A special peculiarity of India's 'gentle anarchists' is that, as Gandhians, they enjoy the distinction of being perceived as 'legitimate revolutionaries'.
- 6) Jayaprakash Narayan, *Towards Total Revolution*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1978, Vol.1, pp.245-6. Vasant Nargolkar, an early Sarvodaya advocate of a return to Gandhian satyagraha, has emphasised this point in *JP Vindicated!*, Chand, New Delhi, 1977, p.13.
- 7) The programme was outlined in an address to the Radical Humanists given in December. See *People's Action*, January 1974.
- 8) *Everyman's*, 20 April 1975.
- 9) *Everyman's*, 27 April 1975, quoted in G. Shah, *Protest Movement in Two Indian States*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1977, p.160.
- 10) JP agreed with the point when I put it to him in an interview, 6 January 1979.
- 11) *People's Action*, March 1973.
- 12) Not in the same statement but in an interview the same month given to N. S. Jagannathan, reported in *People's Action*, September 1974.
- 13) *People's Action*, January 1975.
- 14) Although the Vinoba supporters were only a small minority in the Sangh, from the outset, through the unanimity rule, they prevented the organisation endorsing the Bihar struggle. A united Sangh could have played a significant role in spreading the movement outside Bihar, although, compared with the opposition parties, it was a weak organisation.
- 15) The potential derives from the truth, emphasised by Gandhi, that any system of rule is based on the consent, active or passive, of the ruled -

the concept of 'voluntary servitude'. The potential, of course, has never been fully demonstrated, but many revolutions illustrate it and contradict the received view that physical force is the decisive factor in conflicts. The recent Iranian revolution is a case in point.

- 16) Jayaprakash Narayan, *Total Revolution*, Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, Varanasi, 1975, p. 109.
- 17) In the controversies within Sarva Seva Sangh, JP's supporters argued that the next election in Bihar would be, in effect, a referendum not an ordinary election.
- 18) *Indian Express*, 30 October 1974.
- 19) *Indian Recorder and Digest*, December 1974.
- 20) See S.K. Ghose, *The Crusade and End of Indira Raj*, Intellectual Book Corner, New Delhi, 1978, p. 132.
- 21) *Everyman's*, 23 November 1974.
- 22) Thakurdas Bang even went so far as to attribute to 'opponents of the movement' the suggestion that the Janata Sarkars were intended to be a system of parallel government. - *People's Action*, 5 June 1975. But see Vasant Nargolkar's discussion of the subject in his *JP's Crusade for Revolution*, Chand, New Delhi, 1975, ch. 9.
- 23) The original plans for the March provided that it should be followed by direct action in the form of a gherao of Parliament, but this was dropped.
- 24) See his article 'Is JP's movement at the crossroads?', *Everyman's* 20 April 1975.
- 25) In the first entry of his *Prison Diary*, 21 July 1975, JP wrote: 'Where have my calculations gone wrong? (I almost said "our", but that would be wrong. I must bear the full, the whole, responsibility.)' It is clear, however, that the opposition party leaders shared the responsibility.
- 26) Reported in *Swaraj*, 15, published in London.
- 27) Even Vinoba, who continued to think that the form of democracy adopted by India was 'not very congenial for the country' and should be called 'demonocracy', felt constrained to support, via the acharyas' conference of January 1976, a call for holding the general election as early as feasible. When JP met Vinoba on 18 July 1976, he told him: 'To those who ask me for a programme I say that they should demand elections. You also should support this cause.' Vinoba is reported to have replied that another conference of acharyas (not in fact held) was being convened on 2 October 1976 for that very purpose. - *Satyavani* (London), 12 September 1976.



- 28) India Weekly (London), 27 January 1977.
- 29) Reprinted as Appendix 3 of Prison Diary in the edition cited above, p.119.
- 30) The Times of India, 25 January 1975.
- 31) The Indian Express, 15 March 1977.
- 32) The figure reported in Vigil, 1 August 1980.
- 33) Interview with the author, 6 January 1979.
- 34) The phrase is taken from J. A. Naik, From Total Revolution to Total Failure, National Publishing House, Delhi, 1979. Compare the same author's equally rhetorical, The Great Janata Revolution, Chand, New Delhi, 1977.
- 35) The fetishistic attitude to nonviolence was evident in the attitude of some of JP's Sarvodaya critics who consistently ignored the official and often illegal violence of the authorities. JP's attitude to nonviolence was essentially pragmatic and he came to describe the Bihar movement as 'peaceful' rather than 'nonviolent' in the Gandhian sense.
- 36) 'Mistakenly', that is, from the nonviolent revolutionary perspective. In practice, Naxalite violence has proved counterproductive, strengthening the coercive power of the Indian State.
- 37) See Radhakrishna's comments on the Sarva Seva Sangh conference of September 1973 in People's Action, October 1973.
- 38) On the 'saintly idiom' in Indian politics, see W. H. Morris-Jones' contribution in C. H. Philips (ed.), Politics and Society in India, Allen and Unwin, London, 1963.
- 39) T. K. Oommen, 'Rethinking Gandhian Approach', Gandhi Marg, 7, October 1979.
- 40) The State as a form of alienation is a theme of Marx's early writings but the theme, in less Hegelian language, is central to anarchist theories of the State. Like Bakunin, Marx talked about the 'abolition' of the State but the anarchists' use of this term led later Marxists to drop it in favour of talk about a 'proletarian State' which would eventually wither away.
- 41) Quoted in Martin Buber, Paths in Utopia, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1949, p.46.
- 42) I refer here, of course, to the conference of acharyas, January 1976. The conception of Sarvodaya workers as a moral, as opposed to a power-oriented, elite is not elitist in the sense referred to here: they are an

elite only in that they manifest better than others the new values. In practice many Sarvodaya workers are elitist in the worse sense and are paternalistic in their approach to the people, not genuinely identifying with them.

- 43) The appropriate posture of nonviolent revolutionary is to oppose and to resist the State, as far as is practical, which is not the same as continually confronting it.